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A

CONTINUATION

OF THE

LETTERS

TO THE

PHILOSOPHERS and POLITICIANS of FRANCE,

ON THE SUBJECT OF

RELIGION;

AND OF THE

LETTERS to a PHILOSOPHICAL UNBELIEVER,

IN ANSWER TO

MR. PAINE's AGE OF REASON.

BY JOSEPH PRIESTLEY, L.L.D. F.R.S. &c. &c.

PRINTED AT NORTHUMBERLAND:

REPRINTED AT SALEM, BY THOMAS C. CUSHING; AND SOLD BY CUSHING AND CARLTON, AT THE BIBLE, ESSEX-STREET.

1795.

BRITISH MUSEUM

PREFACE.

THIS pamphlet conſiſts of two tracts; or rather it is the continuation of two different works; which, becauſe they both relate to the ſame general ſubject, I publiſh together. When the works to which they belong ſhall be reprinted, they will, of courſe, be ſeparated.

The turn that infidelity has lately taken in France is not a little remarkable; but it promiſes well for the cauſe of religion. Whether the belief profeſſed by the National Aſſembly in the being and attributes of God, and in a future ſtate, be ſincere, or not, it ſhews the ſenſe they entertain of the *importance* of this faith, to the good conduct and happineſs of men, as members of ſociety. And as a compariſon of the evidences of *natural* and *revealed* religion will ſoon convince all reaſonable perſons, that the latter is much more free from difficulty than the former, I am perſuaded that when the prejudice which is now conceived againſt chriſtianity, on account of the ſhocking corruptions and abuſes of it, ſhall begin to wear off, it will be embraced firſt by philoſophers, then perhaps by the French nation in general, and laſtly by the world at large; when, I have no doubt, it will be found to be infinitely better calculated to

anſwer

anſwer the purpoſe, not of *moraliſts* alone, but even of *politicians*, than the principles of mere natural religion.

We muſt not, however, be ſurpriſed if infidelity ſhould continue to prevail to a much greater extent than it has done yet. The ſame general cauſes, which, in a late publication, I have endeavoured to point out, and which have produced what we now ſee, muſt continue to operate ſome time longer; and the prophecies of ſcripture lead us to expect the ſame. Conſequently, the faith of intelligent Chriſtians will be ſo far from being ſhaken, that it will be confirmed, by the preſent appearance of things, though all that is gained by the moſt rational and effectual defences of chriſtianity be little more than an increaſed attachment of the few who are truly ſerious and conſiderate.

How exceedingly ſuperficial and frivolous are the hackneyed objections to chriſtianity, and how entirely they ariſe from the groſſeſt ignorance of the ſubject, will appear from my animadverſions on Mr. Paine's boaſted work. He would have written more to the purpoſe, if he had been acquainted with the writings of Voltaire, and other better informed unbelievers. But he ſeems entirely unread on the ſubject, and thereby to be unacquainted with the ground on which either the friends or the enemies of chriſtianity muſt ſtand. Had he been better acquainted with the ſcriptures, which are a conſtant

ſubject

ſubject of his ridicule, he might have made a much more plauſible attack upon them.

This, it muſt be owned, leaves but little merit to the beſt anſwerer of Mr. Paine. But it is proper that when, from whatever circumſtances, any work is likely to make an unfavourable impreſſion on the minds of men, endeavours ſhould be uſed to counteract the effects of it. I may alſo be allowed to make the ſame apology for my frequent defences of revealed religion, that Voltaire did for his infinitely varied attacks upon it, viz. that different works fall into different hands, and, provided the great end be anſwered, repetitions are not uſeleſs. For my own part, ſo ſenſible am I of the unſpeakable value of revealed religion, and of the ſufficiency of its proofs, that I think no man can employ his time better, than in giving juſt exhibitions of them, and in diverſifying thoſe exhibitions, as particular occaſions call for them.

But the more I attend to this ſubject, the more ſenſible I am, that no defence of chriſtianity can be of any avail, till it be freed from the many corruptions and abuſes which have hitherto encumbered it; and this muſt particularly ſtrike every reader of Mr. Paine's *Age of Reaſon*. The expoſing of theſe corruptions I therefore think to be the moſt eſſential preliminary to the defence of chriſtianity; and conſequently I ſhall omit no fair opportunity of reprobating, in the ſtrongeſt terms, ſuch doctrines

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as thoſe of *tranſubſtantiation*, the *trinity*, *atonement*, &c. &c. &c. to whatever odium I may expoſe myſelf with ſuch Chriſtians as, from the beſt motives, but from ignorance, conſider them as eſſential to the ſcheme. That theſe doctrines, and others which are ſtill generally received even by proteſtants, *are* corruptions of chriſtianity, and were introduced into it from the principles of heathen philoſophy and the maxims and cuſtoms of heathen religions, I have demonſtrated in various of my writings, eſpecially in my *Hiſtory of the Corruptions of Chriſtianity*, a third edition of which will ſoon be publiſhed in this country. Here we happily enjoy the greateſt freedom of diſcuſſion, as well as the freeſt exerciſe of religion, without the interference of the ſtate. Here, therefore, we may expect the natural happy effect of true freedom, in the gradual prevalence of truth, and the manifold deſirable conſequences of it.

I am well aware that I ſhall be blamed, by many ſincere friends of chriſtianity, who may approve of my zeal, and even the ground of my defence of our common principles in other reſpects, that I ſo frequently introduce what is offenſive to them, with reſpect of my ideas of chriſtianity. But it is in the nature of things impoſſible to ſeparate the defence of chriſtianity from a view of what I deem to be its true principles, and which alone I can undertake to defend. The perſons who object to me on this account, are equally at liberty to defend chriſtianity

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on *their* peculiar principles, though they introduce things offenſive to me. Free diſcuſſion will in time enable us to demonſtrate the truth of chriſtianity, if it be true; and alſo to aſcertain the genuine principles of it, whatever they be. May the God of truth lead us into all truth.

Northumberland, October 27, 1794.

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LETTERS

ADDRESSED TO THE

PHILOSOPHERS and POLITICIANS

OF

FRANCE.

LETTER VI.

Of the beſt Method of communicating moral Inſtruction to Man.

MY FELLOW CITIZENS,

I HAVE read with pleaſure, and even with enthuſiaſm, the admirable *Report of Roberſpierre* on the ſubject of *Morals and Religion*, and rejoice to find by it, that ſo great and happy a change has taken place in the ſentiments of the leading men in France, ſince the year 1774, when I was in your country. Then, excepting Mr. Neckar, who was a Proteſtant, every perſon of eminence to whom I had acceſs, and, as I ſaw reaſon to think, every man of letters almoſt without exception, was a profeſſed atheiſt, and an unbeliever in a future

ſtate on any principle whatever. At preſent your whole National Aſſembly have profeſſed their belief in the being of a God, and alſo in a future ſtate, on the principle of the *immortality of the ſoul*, as highly uſeful, if not neceſſary, to the obſervance of thoſe moral duties, which are eſſential to the well-being of ſociety.

Taking it for granted, that theſe are now *your* ſentiments, as well as thoſe of the National Aſſembly, many of whoſe members rank with philoſophers, as well as politicians, give me leave freely to expoſtulate with you on your rejection of chriſtianity, which has no other than the ſame object, and the principles of which appear to me to be much better calculated to anſwer your great purpoſe. The laws of morality, whether they reſpect the Supreme Being, our fellow creatures, or ourſelves, ſuch as the obligation of oaths, the duties of juſtice and humanity, thoſe of men in the relations of magiſtrates and common citizens, of huſbands and wives, of parents and children, of maſters and ſervants, and the rules of ſobriety and moderation in the government of all our paſſions, are taught with infinitely greater clearneſs and authority in the ſcriptures, as the voice of God, the common parent of the human race, than they are by the mere light of nature.

The ſufficiency of the light of nature is the frequent boaſt of unbelievers in revelation; but the deduction of moral and religious truths, ſpeculative or practical, from mere appearances in nature, is, in many caſes, far too difficult for the bulk of mankind. That by the mere light of nature mankind in general would ever have attained to the idea of a God, an intelligent author of nature, is by no means probable. Appearances which are conſtant and invariable, as I have obſerved before, ſeldom draw the attention of the bulk of mankind. They ſee that ſtones, and other heavy bodies, always fall to the ground; they ſee the ſun, moon and ſtars, riſe and ſet every day; they ſee ſummer and winter

ter ſucceed one another every year; they perceive in themſelves various powers of action and enjoyment; but without attending to the cauſes, or reaſons, of theſe things, or contenting themſelves with the moſt abſurd and inſufficient reaſons. It is enough for them that the appearances are uniform, ſo that they can always depend upon them, and act accordingly.

The moſt ſublime and fundamental doctrines of religion are thoſe of the unity of God, of the immenſity of creation being the work of one great agent, governed by one ſuperintending providence, and tending to one great end, viz. the happineſs of the percipient, and eſpecially the rational, part of the univerſe. But theſe are ſo far from being deductions eaſily drawn by the bulk of mankind, that, after being in poſſeſſion of them, they have appeared to be too great to be retained by them, and have always eluded their graſp. The doctrine of a multiplicity of gods, gods of different provinces, powers, and characters, ſome aiming to do good, and others evil, has always forced itſelf on mankind, and has never failed to be followed by the moſt abſurd and miſchievous ſuperſtitious practices, calculated, as was imagined, to obtain the favour of theſe various deities. This has ever been the caſe, with Heathens, Jews, and Chriſtians; and it has only been by repeated revelations, that men have been brought back to the belief of the unity of God, and the important practical conſequences of that belief.

The precepts of univerſal benevolence, and impartial juſtice, are allowed to be the moſt important in the whole ſyſtem of morals; but nature, without a ſuperior interpreter, does not teach them with ſufficient clearneſs and uniformity; becauſe we ſee many evils, and many of them ſuch as the moſt innocent perſons are involved in, take place in the uſual courſe of nature, and therefore, no doubt, according to the will of the Author of nature. That all natural evils are ultimately

ſubſervient to good, I have no doubt, but it is far from being *apparently* ſo; and kings and conquerors, who ſpread undiſtinguiſhing havock wherever they come, might plead that they imitate the Almighty, in his ſtorms and tempeſts, in his plagues, peſtilences, and famines.

It is poſſible, however, that by much reflection, and frequent obſervations on the general order of nature and providence, intelligent perſons might arrive at the belief that all evil will ultimately produce good. But this will not give them the full ſatisfaction which all Chriſtians have, from believing that men inſpired by God have, in ſo many words, aſſured them that *all things will work together for good to them that love him*, that they may ſafely *rejoice in all tribulation*, and even cheerfully die in a good cauſe, depending upon a happy reſurrection, and an abundant recompenſe being made to them in the life to come. It is impoſſible that the mere contemplation of nature ſhould give men this full confidence, which is the parent of habitual devotion, and of the moſt heroic action.

That men are the offspring of God, and therefore that he is our parent, are ideas ſufficiently natural, pleaſing, and uſeful; but they are only realized, and felt, when God actually calls us his children, and encourages us to addreſs him as *our Father who is in Heaven*.

What nature teaches us with reſpect to the manner in which we ſhould conduct ourſelves in life, is not in *words*, intelligible to all men, but muſt be deduced by way of *inference* from appearances, which one man will interpret in one way, and another in a different one; and every man being neceſſarily biaſſed by his own prevailing inclination, he will generally conceive that his own favourite purſuit is not forbidden by it; ſo that moſt men will live much as they pleaſe, and yet all imagine that *they live agreeably to nature*. But in revelation,

lation, God, the author of nature, ſpeaks in a language, that, with reſpect to every thing of importance, can never be miſunderſtood, and which muſt ever command reſpect. It is equally the language of a parent, and of a ſovereign, anxious for the happineſs of all his children.

All that you can make of *nature* is a figurative perſonage, whom you may addreſs as you would the heavens or the earth, which are parts of it; and of God, conſidered merely as the *author of nature*, (but who has never diſcovered himſelf except in viſible objects, ſuch as the ſun, moon, and ſtars, the earth, or the plants and animals with which it is ſtocked) you cannot form ſuch an idea as you do of a *perſon*, approaching more nearly to a human being, of whoſe feelings you have a perfect knowledge, and to whom, by the principle of aſſociation, ſentiments of veneration and love, which lead to obedience, are intimately united. The idea of the mere author of nature, whom you can ſee only in his works, will not make ſuch an impreſſion on the mind of man, as is made by that of a real perſon, who, beſides being conceived to be intimately preſent to you, can, if he pleaſe, ſpeak to you, and permit you to ſpeak to him, and to whom you can always addreſs yourſelves with a certainty of being heard, and being attended to by him. The promiſes and threatenings of ſuch a being as this will be reſpected as thoſe of a magiſtrate or a parent.

The God of the Scriptures *is* apprehended in this light, as the experience of all Jews and Chriſtians witneſſes. The God who appeared to Abraham, who delivered the law from Mount Sinai, who ſpake by the prophets, and who diſplayed his power, and ſignified his will, by Chriſt and the apoſtles, will be conſidered, and behaved to, as a real perſon, the object of the higheſt reverence, and the moſt ſincere attachment; one to whom men will naturally pray, and in whom they will put

put confidence. And the commands of ſuch a Being, delivered by his authorized meſſengers, will be obeyed as thoſe of a real ſovereign, whoſe favour will be deſired, and whoſe diſpleaſure will be dreaded; and conſequently, as theſe commands had no other object than the duties of morality, this ſyſtem of *revelation*, which you diſclaim, is far better adapted to promote your great object, than the ſyſtem of mere *natural religion*.

So much more are men impreſſed by any thing approaching to *humanity*, that there was the greateſt wiſdom and propriety in the Divine Being condeſcending not only to make uſe of articulate ſounds, ſuch as conſtitute human ſpeech; but to exhibit appearances of the human form in his firſt communications with man, as was probably the caſe with Adam, and perhaps with Abraham; though afterwards, as men attained more juſt and ſublime ideas of the Supreme Being, thoſe appearances were withdrawn. That there is nothing in reality revolting to the human mind in the idea of the Divine Being condeſcending to manifeſt himſelf to men in this familiar manner, however it may now be objected to, is evident from univerſal hiſtory, which ſhews that all men, in early ages, expected, and readily believed, ſuch appearances. Nor was this the caſe with the vulgar only: for Socrates himſelf, ſenſible of the darkneſs in which he and the reſt of mankind were involved, with reſpect to truths of the greateſt importance, expreſſed his earneſt wiſh of ſome divine inſtructor.

I am, &c.

LETTER

LETTER VII.

Of Hiſtorical Evidence.

GENTLEMEN,

HISTORICAL evidence, on which the belief and authority of revelation muſt neceſſarily reſt, has been greatly undervalued by the advocates for the ſufficiency of the light of nature. But the experience of all mankind is againſt them; ſince there are no truths which more readily gain the aſſent of mankind, or are more firmly retained by them, than thoſe of an hiſtorical nature, depending upon the teſtimony of others. It is a kind of evidence to which all men are moſt accuſtomed, ſo that it is quite familiar to them; and it is peculiarly adapted to the great bulk of manikind, who are unuſed to abſtract ſpeculation. The authority of a parent or of a tutor, we ſee to have the greateſt weight with young perſons, and others who have not been uſed to think for themſelves. They naturally take it for granted, that what they have been taught by *them* may be depended upon; and from their own natural love of truth, they acquire a general confidence, that when men who are even ſtrangers to them, have no intereſt in their deception, they will not deceive them.

Hence it is that we have, in fact, no firmer perſuaſion concerning any thing, than we have of the exiſtence of many things, which we have never ſeen ourſelves, nor ever expect to ſee, and of the truth of facts, which we know only from the information of others, as that there are ſuch places as Conſtantinople and Pekin, and that Charles I. of England, and Lewis XVI. of France, were beheaded; and no diſtance of time ſenſibly diminiſhes the force of this perſuaſion, when the facts have been fully aſcertained. Who, that is at all acquainted with

with ancient hiſtory, entertains the leaſt doubt of Julius Cæſar having been killed in the Roman ſenate houſe, of Xerxes having been defeated in his attempts to conquer Greece, or of Babylon having been taken by Cyrus?

Such a faith as *this* we ſee, in fact, to be as ſufficient a foundation for *action*, as faith of any other kind whatever. Conſequently, that God may chooſe to ſignify his will to men, that theſe men may prove their divine miſſion by *miracles*, or ſuch works as God, the author of nature, could alone perform, and that the performance of ſuch miracles may be atteſted by proper evidence, ſo as to be entitled to our fulleſt credit, are things eaſy of belief to mankind in general. Indeed all men, in all ages, have been diſpoſed to believe theſe things, and only a few ſceptical perſons have entertained doubts reſpecting the credibility of miracles, or the propriety of the Divine Being having recourſe to them, in order to communicate his will to men. It is not from *ſuppoſitions*, but from actual *facts*, that we are to learn what mode of inſtruction, or what kind of evidence, is beſt calculated to impreſs the minds of men. The Great Being who made man, and who beſt knows him, will, no doubt, employ the beſt method for this purpoſe; and it ſeems to be agreeable to the general plan of his providence, to make uſe of men for the inſtructors of men.

Rouſſeau, who received the morality, and even the divine miſſion, of Jeſus, though, inconſiſtently enough, without admitting the *miracles* recorded in the books of ſcripture, appears not to have given ſufficient attention to the nature and force of hiſtorical evidence, when he aſks the following queſtions (*Emile* Liv. v.) "God, "you ſay, has ſpoken. But to whom has he ſpoken? "To men. But why, then, have I heard nothing of "it? It would have been no more trouble to him, "and I ſhould then have been ſecure from deception. "How has the miſſion of meſſengers from God been "proved?

" proved? By miracles. But where are thoſe mira-
" cles? In books. Who have written thoſe books?
" Men. And who have ſeen thoſe miracles? The
" men who atteſt them. What, always human teſti-
" mony? Always men who tell men what other men
" have related? How many men between God and
" me?"

He might have aſked juſt the ſame queſtions with reſpect to all facts in ancient hiſtory, or any thing elſe that he himſelf had not ſeen; and yet, like other men, he certainly entertained no more doubt with reſpect to many things of this kind, than if he had ſeen them himſelf.

As to the evidence of *miracles*, it is preciſely of the ſame *nature* with that of other facts. It is only requiſite that it be *ſtronger*, on account of their want of analogy to other facts. But if the evidence of any facts, miraculous or natural, be ſufficient to ſatisfy thoſe who ſaw them, it may be made equally ſatisfactory to thoſe who did not ſee them. If the perſons, who themſelves ſaw the miracles, were in ſufficient numbers, and ſufficiently unbiaſſed, we can have no doubt but that (ſince thoſe perſons were conſtituted in the ſame manner as we are) had we been in their place, *we* ſhould have been as well ſatisfied as they were. Nay, in many caſes men are even better ſatisfied with the evidence of other perſons than they are with their own, from a diſtruſt of their own ſenſes and judgment.

I would alſo obſerve, that if other hiſtories, though written in ancient and unknown languages, can yet be made credible to the unlearned, ſo may the hiſtory of the Bible; and it cannot be denied, that mere French and Engliſh readers have as firm faith in the hiſtories of Greece and Rome as thoſe who are acquainted with the Greek and Roman languages.

Chriſtianity, more than any other religion, is calculated for the uſe of plain and unlearned perſons; and

though the learned only can read the ſcriptures in the original tongues, the moſt unlearned have ſufficient means of ſatisfying themſelves, by comparing different tranſlations, &c. with reſpect to the fidelity with which the *general ſenſe* has been conveyed to them; and this is all that they are intereſted in. This or the other particular book of the Old or New Teſtament, or particular parts of books, may be ſpurious; but if the general hiſtory of the Jews, as contained in the books of Moſes, and the moſt general account of the life of Jeſus, of his principal miracles, his death, and his reſurrection, as related by any of the evangeliſts, be true, we have ſufficient reaſon to regulate our lives by the precepts of chriſtianity, from the firmeſt faith in that reſurrection to an immortal life, of which it gives us the fulleſt aſſurance.

In order to form a judgment concerning the reality of prophecies and miracles, which are the proper proofs of a divine miſſion, Rouſſeau (*ib.*) ſays, "We muſt "know the laws of chance and probabilities, to judge "whether a prediction can be accompliſhed without a "miracle: we muſt know the genius of ancient lan-"guages, in order to aſcertain what is a prediction in "thoſe languages, and what is only a figure of ſpeech; "what facts are within the order of nature, and what "are not; and laſtly to ſay, why God has choſen, as an "atteſtation of his having ſpoken, methods which have "themſelves ſo much need of atteſtation; as if he ſport-"ed with the credulity of men, and as if he pur-"poſely avoided the true means of perſuading them."

But if this writer would avoid what he himſelf (*ib.*) conſiders as an intolerable inconvenience, viz. that "there ſhould be as many miracles as natural events," it is abſolutely neceſſary, that they ſhould not be exhibited to all men, but only to ſome men, and on particular occaſions; and that the perſons who were witneſſes of them ſhould tranſmit their knowledge of them to others,

others, in the uſual, but what are found by experience to be ſufficient, methods.

In ſome caſes, no doubt, it may be difficult to diſtinguiſh a prediction from a fortunate gueſs, and alſo a miracle from an event within the compaſs of nature. But in many caſes, and eſpecially ſuch as occur in the ſcripture hiſtory, there is no difficulty at all. With reſpect to theſe, the moſt ſceptical of men cannot pretend that there could be any doubt of the reality of the prediction, or of the miraculous nature of the fact, if the appearances were ſuch as the hiſtorians deſcribe. Was it poſſible, for example, to have been by means of any natural diſeaſe that the firſt born, and the firſt born only, of all the Egyptians, and the firſt born of their cattle, as well as of their men, ſhould all die in one night, and that thoſe of the Iſraelites ſhould entirely eſcape, and after an expreſs and unequivocal prediction, that it would be ſo? Could any power in nature, that we are now acquainted with, divide the Red Sea, and the river Jordan, in ſuch a manner, as that ſome millions of people ſhould walk through them as on dry land?

With reſpect to *prophecy*, could it have been by any natural ſagacity that Moſes predicted the fate of the Iſraelitiſh nation to the end of the world; or, leaving out what is yet to come, could he have deſcribed their ſituation ſo exactly as all hiſtory ſhews it to have been, till this very time, and as we ourſelves now ſee it to be? Or could our Saviour have foretold the deſtruction of Jeruſalem, and the total demolition of the temple, as events that ſhould take place in that very generation, when it is evident, that no other Jew of that age had the leaſt apprehenſion of any ſuch thing? It requires no more knowledge of philoſophy, or of human nature, than all men are poſſeſſed of, in order to avoid deception in ſuch clear caſes as theſe.

I am, &c.

LETTER VIII.

Of the Evidence of a Future State.

GENTLEMEN,

THE principles on which you maintain the doctrine of a *future ſtate of retribution*, are much more liable to be called in queſtion than thoſe of revelation. Philoſophers will never approve of them, and their opinions will have weight with thoſe who are not philoſophers; and no authority of laws can prevent this. It is not your National Aſſembly decreeing that the belief of the being of a God, and of the immortality of the human ſoul, are the principles of religion with Frenchmen, that will make them be *believed* by the people of France, or of any other nation. The proper authority on which any ſpeculative principles, which are the foundation of all practice, are founded, muſt be the *reaſons* alledged in their favour; and it will be ſaid, that admitting there is a God, or an intelligent author of nature, where is the evidence of man ſurviving the grave?

Men are not, in reality, actuated by any other *principles* than thoſe of other animals. Our faculties differ from theirs only in *degree*, and by no means in *kind*; and thoſe of ſome brutes approach very near to thoſe of ſome men; and as men live, ſo they die, in the ſame manner as brute creatures. Conſequently, if it be any thing in the natural conſtitution of man, on which you found your expectation of the immortality of the thinking principle within him, you muſt have the ſame expectation with reſpect to every brute creature, and even every inſect.

When men ceaſe to breathe, they ceaſe to think, and alſo to ſhew any ſigns of perception, juſt as brutes do; and you commit both in the ſame manner to the earth,

earth, when every principle of which they conſiſted is either diſſolved, and diſperſed by the proceſs of putrefaction, or affords nouriſhment to other animals, ſo as to ſuſtian life in ſome other form. What appearance then, or what natural evidence of any kind, is there, that any part of the dead man, or the dead animal, eſcapes? Or, if any thing inviſible to us ſhould eſcape at death, what evidence is there of that part of man retaining all the powers of perception and thought?

If while a man lives, his faculty of thinking is deranged by a blow on the head, or a diſeaſe of the brain; or if when he is thrown into a ſtate of ſound ſleep, his faculty of thinking be ſuſpended, how can he perceive, or think, when his brain is infinitely more diſordered, or when he he has no brain at all? Certainly there is no analogy in nature that can lead us to form ſuch a concluſion. Had we no knowledge of men but in a ſtate of death, it would have been no more rational to ſuppoſe that *they* were poſſeſſed of the power of thinking, than that ſo many logs of wood had the ſame power.

If you ſay that it is impoſſible to conceive *how* the properties of perception and thought ſhould reſult from any organization of mere matter, I ſay it is equally impoſſible to conceive how the properties of gravitation, of magnetiſm, or of electricity, ſhould reſult from the ſubſtances which we find to be endued with them. The connection between the ſubſtance and the properties is equally unknown in all the caſes. Beſides, what do we know of *immaterial ſubſtances* more than we do of thoſe that we call *material?* We have, in fact, no proper idea of any *ſubſtance*, but only of the *properties* by which they affect our ſenſes, and which we ſay inhere in, or belong to them; ſo that to the mere terms *material* or *immaterial*, as expreſſive of *things* or ſubſtances, and excluſive of their *properties*, which we ſay belong to them, we equally annex no ideas at all. Conſequently our difficulty with reſpect to the cauſe of perception and thought,

thought, is not at all removed by ſuppoſing that they belong to an immaterial ſubſtance, which is inviſible to us, and which eſcapes when a man dies.

If you ſay that there muſt be ſomething in man which is immortal, in order to his receiving a juſt recompenſe for his actions in this life, it will be aſked, what reaſon have you to expect that men will receive from the author of nature, any other recompenſe than they do in this life? You can only judge of the *deſigns*, as well as of the power of God, from what you ſee of his works and his providence; and if you ſee that men actually *do* die in their crimes, without receiving any proper puniſhment, the fair inference is, that the author of nature, who is the author of life and of death, did not intend that they ſhould receive any. If you form any other idea of God, he is a being of your own imagination, and therefore nothing that you can ſuppoſe ſuch a being as *he* ought to do, or to provide for, can be the ground of any real expectation whatever.

I cannot help obſerving, that Monſ. Roberſpierre, in his excellent *Report* on the ſubject, gives no reaſons whatever for his belief in the immortality of the ſoul, beſides the importance and uſe of the doctrine; and Mr. Paine, who in his *Age of Reaſon* profeſſes the ſame belief, contents himſelf with ſaying, page 10, that "The "power which gave him exiſtence is able to continue it, "and that it appears to him more probable that he ſhall "continue to exiſt hereafter, than that he ſhould have "had exiſtence, as he now has, before that exiſtence "began." But he gives no reaſon whatever *why* this appears to him to be probable. Before he had any exiſtence at all, there were numberleſs millions to one, that he never would have exiſted: for exactly ſuch a perſon as Mr. Paine was but *one* of an infinite variety of beings, that might have been produced, and therefore, conſiſtently enough with what he has advanced, there may be many millions to one againſt his exiſtence after death.

death. That the power which gave him exiſtence is *able* to continue it, is no proof at all that he *will* continue it; ſince there is, no doubt, an infinite number of things within the power of the Almighty, that never actually take place.

The more attention you give to this important ſubject, the more ſatisfied, I am confident, you will be, that no principles beſides thoſe of chriſtianity can inſure the firm belief of a future ſtate, as neceſſary to that doctrine of *future retribution*, which you wiſh to eſtabliſh. In the principles of chriſtianity, there is nothing metaphyſical or dubious. That man will ſurvive the grave, chriſtianity aſſures us, not on the principle of the immateriality, or immortality, of any thing inviſible belonging to a man, which death cannot affect, but on the actual reſurrection of the whole man in a future period; and this upon the poſitive word of him that made man, and who, no doubt, has power, though in a manner which we cannot comprehend, to reſtore the life which he firſt gave.

That the Divine Being *has* given men this aſſurance, is confirmed by ſuch evidence as no perſon can reaſonably object to. For, in the nature of things, ſtronger evidence could not have been given, or even imagined; as I preſume I have ſufficiently proved in my *Diſcourſe on the Reſurrection of Jeſus*, to which I take the liberty to refer you. What could the moſt incredulous of men have required, more than that a man, commiſſioned by God, and evidencing his miſſion by unqueſtionable miracles (ſome of which were raiſing of dead perſons to life) ſhould not only aſſert the doctrine, on the authority of thoſe miracles, but, as an ultimate proof of it, ſhould exhibit himſelf as an example of it, by announcing his own death and reſurrection within a limited time, being put to death by his enemies, in the moſt public manner poſſible. The certainty of his reſurrection was alſo evident from the conduct and miracles of the apoſtles, acting in his name afterwards. Evi-

Evidence of this kind is far better adapted to the nature of man than any arguments that can be alledged in favour of the immortality of the human ſoul, which, it is well known, never, in fact, produced any conſiderable effect, ſo as to induce men to *live* and to *act*, and ſtill leſs to *die*, in the full perſuaſion of its truth; and it cannot be denied, that this has been unqueſtionably the caſe of thouſands, and tens of thouſands, with reſpect to the chriſtian doctrine of a reſurrection. What real influence had the doctrine of the immortality of the ſoul upon any of the ancients? And it is well known that the little appearance there was of the belief of it had vaniſhed before the time of Chriſt. It is ſufficiently evident that even Cicero, who with great ingenuity collected and ſtated all the arguments he could find in favour of this doctrine, did not himſelf lay any ſtreſs upon them.

The deiſts of the laſt century in England began, indeed, with profeſſing, as you do, their belief in the immortality of the ſoul, as well as in that of the being of a God, and of a providence; but it was not retained by their diſciples. Few perſons have had an opportunity of being better acquainted with the unbelievers of my own age and country than myſelf; and I can aſſure you, that I have hardly ever known one of them who had the leaſt expectation of a future life; and ſome of them have publicly maintained, that the belief of it, as well as that of the being of a God, has done much harm in the world. If, therefore, you wiſh to eſtabliſh the belief of a future ſtate, as a ſecurity for good morals, you muſt not diſcountenance the chriſtian doctrine of a reſurrection, and rely on a principle which has never yielded it any ſolid ſupport.

Simple unitarian chriſtianity invites your particular and ſerious attention. What you have hitherto ſeen of chriſtianity, has been little more than the ſhocking abuſes and corruptions of it, which have made it ſubſervient

vient to the miſchievous policy of kings and prieſts. Be perſuaded to examine for yourſelves, and you will find, that none of thoſe things which have given you ſo much juſt offence, are at all authorized by the pure goſpel of Chriſt. On the contrary, his doctrines are moſt favourable to the *liberty and equality of man*, and to every thing elſe that contributes to his dignity and happineſs. In the goſpel, men of all ranks and deſcriptions, Jew or Gentile, Barbarian, Scythian, bond or free, as the apoſtle Paul expreſſes himſelf, are conſidered as *brethren*, being equally children of God, and heirs of immortality. They are repreſented as having different parts to act on the great theatre of the world, but as entitled to an equal reward, if they act them well. So far is there from any preference being given to the rich and great, that their chance for the future bliſs is always repreſented as leſs than that of the poor, who, on that account, are pronounced moſt happy.

In the original inſtitutions of Moſes, there was no proviſion for a *king*, though all the neighbouring nations were governed by kings, and in the moſt arbitrary manner; and when the Hebrews wiſhed to imitate their neighbours in this reſpect, as they did in every other, the prophet Samuel, ſpeaking by authority from God, deſcribed to them the fatal conſequence of adopting that form of government, in as earneſt and as emphatical a manner as you yourſelves could now do it, viz. as leading to oppreſſion, and every ſpecies of abuſe.

So far is the goſpel from being a ſyſtem of *eccleſiaſtical tyranny*, which is the uſe that has been unhappily made of it, that nothing is ſo ſtrongly inculcated by Jeſus, as the virtue of humility, and that all pre-eminence is founded on uſefulneſs. Having called his apoſtles together, on two of them diſcovering ſome ſymptoms of ambition, he ſaid, Matt. xx. 25. &c. "Ye know that "the princes of the Gentiles exerciſe dominion over "them, and they that are great exerciſe authority upon "them; but it ſhall not be ſo among you. But "whoſoever will be great among you, let him be your

" miniſter, and whoſoever will be chief among you, let " him be your ſervant; even as the ſon of man came not " to be miniſtered unto, but to miniſter, and to give his " life a ranſom for many." The very ſtyle made uſe of by the popes, who gradually uſurped all power in heaven and in earth, clearly points out this original maxim of the goſpel, for he calls himſelf *the ſervant of the ſervants of God.*

Originally all chriſtian churches were nothing more than voluntary aſſociations of Chriſtians, who appointed officers for the uſe of the ſociety, and diſplaced them whenever they pleaſed; and it was their firſt cuſtom, to appoint a number of the ſame rank, to manage all their concerns; not one of whom, as the *biſhop* in after times, had any more power than another. In ſhort, nothing could be more favourable to the principles of *equal liberty* than the genuine maxims of the goſpel, and the uniform practice of the primitive ages of chriſtianity.

Still more evident is it that miniſters in the chriſtian churches had originally nothing at all to do in civil matters. In what manner they acquired the power of which we find them poſſeſſed afterwards, and what uſe they made of it, eccleſiaſtical hiſtory abundantly ſhews. But in no other caſe will you plead for the total diſuſe of any thing, on account of the abuſes to which it has been ſubject.

Hoping that in the preſent very critical and intereſting ſituation of your country, and of all Europe, you will take theſe things into your ſerious conſideration, I am, with my ſincere wiſhes for the perfect eſtabliſhment of your liberty, and the diſappointment of all your enemies, your highly honoured fellow citizen.

J. PRIESTLEY.

Northumberland, in America.
Vindemaire 7. *De la Republique Francoiſe Ann.* 3.

LETTERS

TO A

Philoſophical Unbeliever.

PART III.

LETTER I.

Of the Sufficiency of the Light of Nature for the Purpoſe of Moral Inſtruction.

DEAR SIR,

CONSIDERING how diſtinguiſhed and important a part Mr. Paine has acted on the theatre of the political world, and the eagerneſs with which his writings have been read, not only in America and in England, but, by means of tranſlations, in all parts of Europe, I do not wonder that you are apprehenſive that his virulent attack upon revelation, in his late work entitled *The Age of Reaſon*, ſhould make an unfavourable impreſſion upon many perſons. And as I have been happy enough, in the former part of our correſpondence, to have given you ſome ſatisfaction with reſpect to the writings of Mr. Gibbon, and other modern unbelievers, you requeſt my peruſal of this work, and my opinion of the ſtrength or weakneſs of the arguments contained in it.

I agree with you in thinking that this work ſhews the

ſame vigour of mind, and ſtrength of expreſſion, that diſtinguiſh the other writings of Mr. Paine. But I hope to ſatisfy you, and others who are ſufficiently candid, that he had not the ſame previous knowledge of the ſubject of which he treats; and without this knowledge of his ſubject, the greateſt mental ability and command of words only enable a man to impoſe upon the ignorant and unwary; who will naturally preſume that when a man writes with great confidence in his own opinion, and contempt of thoſe of others (which are undiſguiſed in this work of our author) he has taken pains to make himſelf maſter of his ſubject, and that he feels the ground on which he ſtands. There can be no doubt but that Mr. Paine thought ſo. But let us examine the foundation of his confidence, beginning with what he ſays of the ſufficiency of the light of nature for moral inſtruction.

"What more," ſays he, "does man want to know, "than that the hand, or power, that made theſe things, "is divine, is omnipotent? Let him believe this, with "the force it is impoſſible to repel if he permits his rea- "ſon to act, and his rule of moral life will follow of "courſe." Speaking of the *creation*, he ſays, "It preaches "to all nations, and to all worlds; and this word of "God reveals to man all that is neceſſary for man to "know of God."

Now, much more is neceſſary to be known by man, than that the hand, which made him and all things, is omnipotent: for all the rules of moral conduct by no means follow from this ſcanty knowledge. A being may be omnipotent, and yet malevolent: for though the idea of a devil has, I believe, no architype in nature, it is poſſible in itſelf, and univerſally thought to be ſo. Nay, whole nations have believed in an originally evil principle, as well as an originally good one.

Indeed, forgetting what he had ſaid about the idea of the mere *omnipotence* of the Author of nature being ſufficient to lead men to the knowledge of all moral duties, Mr. Paine calls to his aid the marks of *benevo-*

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lence which are impreſſed on the face of nature, ſuppoſing the Author of it to ſay to man, "Learn from "my munificence to all, to be kind to each other." There are, no doubt, marks of benevolence, as well as of power, in the conſtitution of nature, and the conduct of providence, ſufficient to enable a reflecting mind to conclude that the Author of nature is ſupremely benevolent, and that the great end of all his works is the happineſs of his creatures. But this is not ſo *apparent*, but that many have drawn a contrary concluſion; and there are appearances in nature which would ſeem to juſtify the generality of mankind, who are unable to take enlarged and extenſive views of things, in drawing it. At leaſt, we ſee in theſe appearances the natural cauſes of their miſtake. For it cannot be denied, that there is much evil as well as good in the world, much pain as well as pleaſure; and that the introduction of the evil was with a view to the production of more good, and not the pleaſure which the introducer of it took in the thing itſelf, is not always evident.

Men naturally judge of the thoughts and deſigns of other intelligent beings by what they experience in themſelves, and obſerve in thoſe about them. Now, whatever be the cauſe, there certainly are perſons who really delight in miſchief, and take a pleaſure in the ſufferings they occaſion to others. It is no wonder, therefore, that men have ſuppoſed that there are beings above them, and at whoſe mercy they are, who take pleaſure in tormenting them; and though they ſhould form an idea, that *one Being* was the author of the various and ſeemingly contradictory appearances in nature (which, however, is more than mankind have ever in fact attained to themſelves) they might ſuppoſe that this great Being was of a variable diſpoſition, ſometimes rejoicing in good, and ſometimes in evil. To learn of him, therefore, and to imitate his conduct, they might think was occaſionally to indulge themſelves in a little miſchief; as, they might ſay, the author of nature did, by ſtorms and earthquakes, or when he ſent war,

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and peſtilence, and famine, among them. Men, therefore, left to the mere light of nature, might ſay that, ſince in theſe caſes there is an evident violation of all the rules of juſtice, as well as of mercy and goodneſs, there was no reaſon why men ſhould be bound by laws by which the Supreme Being did not bind himſelf.

Agreeable to this, it is well known, that in the very worſhip which the heathens paid to their gods, they indulged both their luſt and their revenge without the leaſt reſtraint. They even inflicted the greateſt tortures upon themſelves, as well as upon others, as the ſureſt way to gratify the inclinations, and ſecure the favour, of the objects of their worſhip: and, abſurd as we now juſtly think thoſe practices to have been, it was not the wiſdom of man, but the preaching of that goſpel which Mr. Paine treats with ſo much contempt, that brought men off from them. This deſpiſed inſtrument did more for mankind, in this important reſpect, in a few years, than all the learning of the Egyptians, and the philoſophy of the Greeks, were able to do in many centuries. In fact, this learning and philoſophy, and all the light of nature, ſhining on the moſt improved of human minds, effected no real change at all; not one of the moſt abſurd of the popular ſuperſtitions having been corrected by them.

That nature does not teach the duty of *prayer* to God, Mr. Paine is ſo far from aſſerting, that he ridicules the idea of it. "What," ſays he, "is the amount "of all his prayers, but an attempt to make the Al- "mighty change his mind, and act otherwiſe than he "does?" And yet men, when left to nature, have univerſally had recourſe to prayer. How, then, do Mr. Paine's theory, and the practice of mankind, agree? It is, however, evident to me, that mankind in general have, in this reſpect, judged and acted more naturally than Mr. Paine. The generality of mankind, judging of other intelligent beings, and conſequently of the Supreme Being, from what they experienced in themſelves, and obſerved in thoſe with whom they had intercourſe, would

would naturally ſuppoſe that his feelings bore a reſemblance to their own, and that his conduct would be directed by the ſame principles. As, therefore, they had been accuſtomed to apply for what they wanted to their earthly ſuperiors, they would naturally apply to the Supreme Being for ſuch things as they imagined *he* alone could give. Their believing that he knew all their wants, and was well diſpoſed towards them, would not prevent their applying to him; ſince, judging from their own conduct towards their children and dependents, they might think that he would defer his bounty till they applied for it; as that would be an expreſſion of the ſenſe they had of their dependence upon him, and their obligation to him.

In an advanced ſtate of human nature, I can conceive that petition may be an unneceſſary part of prayer. We may perhaps even ſee an impropriety in any mode of direct addreſs to the Deity; and, rejoicing in the full perſuaſion that we have of the benevolence and wiſdom of the Supreme Being, indulge no ſentiments but thoſe of gratitude and joy. But that *petition*, as well as *thankſgiving*, is adapted to the preſent ſtate of human nature and human life, and that it becomes even the moſt intelligent of men to join with the vulgar in that practice which Mr. Paine ſo much ridicules, I have the fulleſt perſuaſion.

Prayer is a neceſſary ſtep in the intellectual and moral improvement of man. That habitual regard to God, which does not imply any direct addreſs to him, but (as Dr. Hartley has admirably and philoſophically explained the proceſs) eminently contributes to exalt and purify the mind, cannot be attained without it. As good and as pious a man as Mr. Paine may be (and on this, no doubt, he founds the hope he expreſſes to have of happineſs beyond this life) I am confident he would have been more pious, and conſequently more virtuous, if he had made conſcience of daily prayer, though it may be too late for him to make the experiment of having recourſe to it now.

If we form our judgment of the light of nature, not from the practice of the bulk of mankind, even in all ages, and all nations, but from the avowed principles and conduct of thoſe who, in oppoſition to the friends of revelation, make the greateſt boaſt of it, we ſhall ſee reaſon to form no high idea of the ſufficiency of it; ſince the moſt celebrated of modern unbelievers have defended practices which are evidently unjuſtifiable.

If there be any thing of a moral nature that is indiſputably right, as a branch of perfect *integrity*, it is, that a man's profeſſions ſhould correſpond to his real ſentiments, and his conduct to his profeſſions; ſo that, both by his words and his actions, he ſhould lead others into no miſtake concerning his principles. In this Mr. Paine perfectly agrees with me. "It is impoſſible," he ſays, "to calculate the moral miſchief, if I may ſo expreſs it, "that mental lying has produced in ſociety. When a "man has ſo far corrupted and proſtituted the chaſtity "of his mind, as to ſubſcribe his profeſſional belief to "things he does not believe, he has prepared himſelf "for the commiſſion of every other crime. He takes up "the trade of a prieſt for the ſake of gain, and in order to "qualify himſelf for that trade, he begins with perjury. "Can we conceive any thing more deſtructive to morality "than this?"

This inſtance of immorality Mr. Paine ſees in its juſt light, when Chriſtians are guilty of it. But unbelievers, who have profeſſed the greateſt attachment to the light of nature, have not only been habitually guilty of the ſame enormity, but have defended their conduct with reſpect to it. Rouſſeau, who firſt ſolemnly abjured the proteſtant religion, in which he was educated, and afterwards as ſolemnly renounced the catholic religion without pretending to have changed his opinion, ſays, (*Emile*, Liv. iv.) "In the uncertainty in which we are, "it is inexcuſable to profeſs any other religion than that "in which we are born, and falſehood not ſincerely to "practiſe what we profeſs." Voltaire always profeſſed himſelf a catholic Chriſtian; and on his death-bed he made

made a confeſſion of his faith, in which he declared he died in the catholic religion, in which he was born.* Mr. Hume, Mr. Gibbon, and the generality of unbelievers in England, always wrote under the maſk of chriſtianity, and attacked it not directly, but only in an artful, inſidious manner. Not ſo the apoſtles, the primitive chriſtians, and the proteſtant martyrs. It is only among the believers in revelation that we ſhall find the noble heroiſm of dying, rather than profeſs what is believed to be a falſehood. Many unbelievers have not ſcrupled to throw away their lives in duels, or to deſtroy themſelves through diſappointment, or *ennui*. But how much more noble is it to die for important truth!

Another virtue, of the greateſt importance to the good order of ſociety, is chaſtity, or an adherence to the rules which have been laid down by all the civilized part of mankind to reſtrain the commerce of the ſexes. But unbelievers, who profeſs to live according to nature, have in general made little account of this virtue. Rouſſeau profeſſed to think himſelf the very beſt of his ſpecies, though he made no ſcruple of his criminal connexion with a great variety of women. He was not married to the woman by whom he had ſeveral children (all of whom he ſent to the foundling hoſpital, without taking any care of their education) till late in life. He alſo ſpeaks in the higheſt terms of the ſublime virtue of a woman with whom himſelf, and, according to his account, many others in their turns, had the ſame conexion. Surely, then, the poſitive command of God was highly expedient, if not abſolutely neceſſary, to reſtrain thoſe irregularities, eventually ſo hurtful to ſociety, and deſtructive of its peace. The authority of the great and wiſe Parent of mankind was required to guide the conduct of his children, before their own reaſon would have diſcovered the true rule of life, and the way to happineſs.

I am, &c.

* See his Life, written by Condorcet.

LETTER II.

Of the Nature of Revelation, and its proper Evidence.

DEAR SIR,

IT muſt be allowed by all perſons, that the only proper evidence of revelation is a *miracle*, or ſomething out of the uſual courſe of nature. For no other than the Author of the laws of nature can controul them, and depart from them. But ſays Mr. Paine, p. 136, "Unleſs we "know the whole extent of the laws, and of what are "commonly called the powers of nature, we are not a-"ble to judge whether any thing that may appear to us "wonderful or miraculous be within, or be beyond, or "be contrary to, her natural power of acting."

To this it is eaſy to reply, that though no man knows the whole extent of the powers or laws of nature, we are ſufficiently well acquainted with *ſome* of them. Not to mention the caſe of the death of the firſt born, and of the firſt born only, both of men, and of cattle, in the whole of Egypt, in one hour of one particular night, and that diſtinctly announced beforehand; or the dividing the Red Sea, or the river Jordan, ſo that a whole nation could march through them at their leiſure (which are facts in the Old Teſtament hiſtory) will Mr. Paine himſelf ſay, that the inſtantaneous cure of all kinds of diſeaſes, not excepting thoſe that require the longeſt medical treatment, ſuch as dropſies, palſies and inſanity, by a word ſpeaking, was within the uſual courſe of nature; or that a man could walk on the ſea, and ſtill a tempeſt, by command, without a miracle? Still leſs will he ſay, that a man who had been crucified on Friday, and left alone in a ſepulchre, could walk about and converſe on the Sunday following, as if nothing had been done to him, without a miracle. Admitting the facts to be as they are repreſented in the goſpel hiſtory, he would ſurely ſay, that, little as we know of the whole compaſs of nature, ſuch things as

theſe

theſe are clearly beyond it, and unqueſtionably *ſupernatural.*

It is mere burleſque writing, and unworthy of this ſerious ſubject, to ſay (*on* the ſuppoſition of miracles being employed to prove a divine miſſion) as Mr. Paine does, p. 139, "It is degrading the Almighty into the cha-"racter of a ſhowman, playing tricks, to amuſe and make "the people ſtare and wonder;" when, in the nature of things, miracles were neceſſary to engage the attention of mankind, and to convince them of the power and preſence of God.

He ſays, (*ib.*) "That whenever recourſe is had to ſhew "for the purpoſe of procuring belief (for a miracle under "any idea of the word is a ſhew) it implies lowneſs or "weakneſs in the doctrine that is preached." But might not Mr. Paine with juſt as much reaſon ſay, that the exhibition of the works of nature is only another kind of ſhew, and therefore that no doctrine can be taught by *it?* But there are doctrines which, to man at leaſt, abſolutely require the aid of miracles to their proof; as that of a reſurrection from the dead at a future period, which it is impoſſible for us to learn from any appearances in nature; but which we may firmly believe on the expreſs word of our Maker, aſcertained in the only way in which it poſſibly can be aſcertained, viz. by a miracle.

But Mr. Paine thinks that, admitting the poſſibility of miracles, the reality of them can never be made *credible.* "Is it more probable, ſays he, p. 141, that nature ſhould "go out of her courſe, or that a man ſhould tell a lie? "We have never ſeen, in our time, nature go out of her "courſe; but we have good reaſon to believe that mil-"lions of lies have been told in the ſame time. It is, "therefore, at leaſt, millions to one that the reporter of "a miracle tells a lie."

This is by no means the true ſtate of the caſe, as it reſpects the miracles recorded in the ſcriptures. Should, indeed, any ſingle perſon, eſpecially a ſtranger, come and tell me that he ſaw a man, who was unqueſtionably dead,

ſuddenly riſe up, walk about, and converſe, as in perfect health, I ſhould, no doubt, conclude either that he was deceived himſelf, or that he deſigned to impoſe upon me; this being more probable than the truth of the fact. But when I find that thouſands and tens of thouſands of perſons, who had the beſt opportunity of informing themſelves concerning a fact of this miraculous nature, and who had every motive that men could have to ſcrutinize the evidence with the greateſt rigour, ſhew their full perſuaſion of the truth of it by relinquiſhing every thing dear to them in life, and even life itſelf, rather than give up their belief of it; the queſtion to be conſidered is, whether it be more probable that ſuch a number of perſons, circumſtanced as theſe were, could be impoſed upon, or the thing itſelf be true; and eſpecially if a great and good end was viſibly anſwered by the truth of the fact, which is the caſe with reſpect to thoſe miracles which eſtabliſhed the belief of chriſtianity. And what a chriſtian ſays, is, that to ſuppoſe all theſe perſons, who had the perfect uſe of all their ſenſes, and who were as capable of judging as he himſelf could be, and as much intereſted in aſcertaining the truth, to be deceived, would in reality be more extraordinary, and therefore, properly ſpeaking, more miraculous, than the fact in queſtion.

It is, no doubt, true, that millions of lies have been told by men; but if only ten or a dozen men, of Mr. Paine's own acquaintance, ſhould, independently of one another, tell him the ſame thing, as equally ſeen by themſelves, and he ſhould not be able to diſcover any motive that they could have to wiſh to deceive him, I am perſuaded that, like any other man in the ſame circumſtances, his incredulity would be ſtaggered.

It is upon the idea of the utter incredibility of miracles, that Mr. P. ſpeaking of them, makes the following extraordinary aſſertion; "It is," ſays he, p. 139, "the moſt "equivocal ſort of evidence that can be ſet up. For "the belief is not to depend on the thing called a *mira-* "*cle*, but upon the credit of the reporter, who ſays that

"he

" he ſaw it; and therefore the thing, were it true, would " have no better chance of being believed, than if it " were a lie." The credit of the reporter is, no doubt, neceſſary to my faith in the miracle which he reports. But this being eſtabliſhed, the miracle is a juſt foundation of my belief in a divine interpoſition, becauſe none can work a miracle but God only.

It is upon the ſame ſuppoſition of the abſolute incredibility of miracles, that he ſays, p. 138, " Since appearances " are ſo capable of deceiving, and things not real have a " ſtrong reſemblance to things that are, nothing can be " more inconſiſtent than to ſuppoſe that the Almighty " would make uſe of means, ſuch as are called miracles, " that would ſubject the perſon who performed them, to " the ſuſpicion of being an impoſtor, and the perſons " who related them, to be ſuſpected of lying, and the " doctrine intended to be ſupported thereby, to be ſuſ- " pected as a fabulous invention." But the ſuſpicion of impoſture does not neceſſarily ariſe from the relation of a miracle, but upon various circumſtances attending the narrative; and in theſe caſes, one perſon might entertain a ſuſpicion, when another had none at all. Hiſtory unqueſtionably proves that Mr. Paine's reaſoning on the abſolute incredibility of miracles is not well founded. Since he cannot deny that credit has been given to miracles, by men of all nations, in all ages; it is evident, that they *are* adapted to gain credit with men, and that, by having recourſe to them, the Supreme Being has not made uſe of an improper inſtrument for gaining his purpoſe.

The following is another truly curious, and I believe a quite original, argument of Mr. Paine's on this ſubject. " It is," ſays he, p. 13, " a contradiction in terms and " ideas, to call any thing a *revelation*, that comes to us " at ſecond hand, either verbally or in writing. Reve- " lation is neceſſarily limited to the firſt communication. " After this it is only an account of ſomething which " that perſon ſays was a revelation made to *him*; and " though he may find himſelf obliged to believe it, it

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" cannot be incumbent on *me* to believe it in the ſame " manner, for it was not a revelation made to me, and " I have only his word for it that it was made to *him*."

On this principle it is not incumbent on Mr. Paine to believe what any perſon may tell him, and he may give credit to nothing but what he ſees himſelf, in which caſe his faith will be reduced to a very ſmall compaſs indeed. His pretence to *a contradiction in terms* is a mere quibble. We do not ſay, that the revelation made immediately to Moſes, or to Chriſt, is, ſtrictly ſpeaking, a revelation to *us*. But if we ſee ſufficient reaſon to believe that the revelation was made to *them*, we are, properly ſpeaking, believers in revelation; and if the revelation, whatever it be, relate to the whole human race, as well as to the perſon to whom it was immediately made, all mankind, Mr. Paine himſelf included, will find themſelves under an equal obligation to reſpect it.

Mr. Paine's obſervation on the inſufficiency of human language, to tranſmit the knowledge of revelation, is trite, but as little to the purpoſe. " Human language," he ſays, p. 85, " is local and changeable, and is therefore inca- " pable of being uſed as the means of unchangeable and " univerſal information." As to tranſlations, he ſays, p. 64, " Every man, who knows any thing of languages, " knows that it is impoſſible to tranſlate from one lan- " guage into another, not only without loſing a great " part of the original, but frequently miſtaking the " ſenſe." But the truth of revelation does not depend upon niceties of ideas, which it is difficult to expreſs, or upon the niceties of any particular lannuage, which it is difficult to transfuſe into another language. What miſtake has ever ariſen, or can poſſibly ariſe, from the tranſlation of the *ten commandments*, or the *Lord's prayer*, into all the languages in the world? Mr. Paine might as well ſay, that the great facts in the Roman Hiſtory, ſuch as the conqueſt of Carthage, or the death of Julius Cæſar, could never be credible, becauſe they are recorded in human language, which is local and changeable,

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and the tranſlation of it uncertain, as that the Moſaic or Chriſtian hiſtory is incredible on that account. If there be ſuch a thing as *cavilling*, unworthy of a ſerious writer, it is ſuch reaſoning as this. Indeed, I do not think I have any where met with more confident aſſertions, or a looſer mode of arguing, than in this tract of Mr. Paine's.

I am, &c.

LETTER III.

Of the Object of Chriſtianity, and of the Hiſtory of Jeſus.

DEAR SIR,

YOU will not much wonder that a perſon, ſo occupied as Mr. Paine has been, and ſo uſefully occupied, in matters of civil policy, ſhould not underſtand *every thing*; though his extraordinary ſucceſs in writing on ſome ſubjects might lead him to think himſelf equal to any other. But you are now, I am perſuaded, convinced, that, diſtinguiſhed as his abilities are, he has not given ſufficient attention to the ſubject of *revelation*; that he has totally miſconceived the object of it, and eſpecially the nature of its *evidence*. His ignorance of this ſubject, ariſing I ſuppoſe chiefly from his contempt for it, is more apparent in what he ſays concerning chriſtianity in particular, the origin of which, as lying within the compaſs of well known hiſtory, it was much eaſier for him to make himſelf acquainted with.

What is more remarkable ſtill, Mr. Paine admits things that are manifeſtly inconſiſtent with one another. For, according to him, nothing can be more truly amiable and excellent than the character of Jeſus, the founder of chriſtianity, or more upright and diſintereſted than his views in founding it, and yet nothing more deteſtable than the real ſpirit and tendency of it. Indeed,

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he himſelf ſays, p. 57, ſpeaking of the New Teſtament, "Out of the matters contained in thoſe books, together "with the aſſiſtance of ſome old ſtories, the church has "ſet up a ſyſtem of religion very contradictory to the "character of the perſon whoſe name it bears."

"He was, he ſays, p. 18, a virtuous and amiable man. "The morality that he preached and practiſed was of "the moſt benevolent kind; and though ſimilar ſyſ- "tems of morality had been preached by Confucius, "and by ſome of the Greek philoſophers, many years "before, by the Quakers ſince, and by many good men "in all ages, it has not been exceeded by any."

"The church," he ſays, p. 57, "has ſet up a religion of "pomp and of revenue, in the pretended imitation of a "perſon whoſe life was humility and poverty." "Je- "ſus, he ſays, p. 22, preached the moſt excellent morality, "and the equality of man; but he preached alſo againſt "the corruptions and avarice of the Jewiſh prieſts, and "this brought upon him the hatred and vengeance of "the whole order of prieſthood." "All national inſti- "tutions of churches, whether Jewiſh, Chriſtian or "Turkiſh," he ſays, p. 9, "appear to me to be no other "than human inventions, ſet up to terrify and enſlave "mankind, and monopolize power and profit."

Here, then, is an extraordinary circumſtance, which requires a little inveſtigation. The founder of the chriſtian ſyſtem was confeſſedly the moſt unambitious of men, and yet his religion (for he does not ſay the corruption or abuſes of it) was "an invention ſet up to en- "ſlave mankind, and to monopolize power and profit." If the apoſtles, and not Jeſus, were the founders of this religion, as Mr. Paine ſeems to intimate, they were peculiarly unfortunate in their choice of a patron, and very unſucceſsful with reſpect to their object. For none of them acquired any ſhare of power or profit; and in general, after living wretched lives, ſubject to every mode of perſecution, died violent deaths. If this ſcheme of "enſlaving mankind, and monopolizing power and profit," had any later origin, it cannot be aſcribed to chriſtianity itſelf, but to ſomething that aroſe out of it, and

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for which it is not anſwerable; and all hiſtory, though Mr. Paine may be unacquainted with it, proves that this was the very fact.

But before I conſider Mr. Paine's account of the origin of the ſyſtem to which he ſo much objects, I ſhall attend to what he farther ſays concerning *Jeſus* himſelf; and this, like his account of the object of his religion, is a ſtrange mixture of truth and falſehood. That ſuch a perſon as Jeſus Chriſt exiſted (a thing not admitted by Mr. Volney, Lequinio, and other philoſophers in France) Mr. Paine, p. 22, does not deny. He farther ſays, "That he was crucified, which was the mode of "execution at that day, is an hiſtorical relation ſtrictly "within the limits of probability." "Moſt probably, "he ſays, p. 78, he worked at his father's trade, which "was that of a carpenter; and he does not appear to "have had any ſchool education, for his parents were ex-"tremely poor." This the evangelical hiſtory confirms; but when he adds, that "the probability is that he could not write," he certainly had no foundation for it at all. If the general account of the hiſtory of Jeſus, which Mr. Paine does not call in queſtion, may be depended upon, he read in a Jewiſh ſynagogue; and the probability is, that a man who can read fluently, as reading in public requires, could alſo write. In one incident recorded of *him*, John viii. 6. he wrote, or made ſome kind of characters, on the ground. Mr. Paine ſays, p. 19, "Jeſus wrote no account of himſelf, of his "birth, parentage, or any thing elſe. Not a line of "what is called the New Teſtament is of his writing. "The hiſtory of him is altogether the work of other "people." But ſuch was the caſe with Socrates, and yet it was never inferred from that circumſtance that he could not write.

That Mr. Paine was very little acquainted with the real character, and even the common hiſtory, of Jeſus, is evident from his ſaying, p. 23, "It is not improbable "that the Roman government might have ſome ſecret "apprehenſion of the effects of his doctrine, as well as

" the Jewiſh prieſts. Neither is it improbable, that " Jeſus Chriſt had in contemplation the delivery of the " Jewiſh nation from the bondage of the Romans. Be- " tween the two, however, this virtuous reformer and " revolutioniſt loſt his life."

Certainly there is no appearance of any thing like this in the evangelical hiſtory. On the contrary, Jeſus not only carefully avoided giving any umbrage to the Roman government, but he declined giving his opinion on any political ſubject whatever. When he was applied to about the diviſion of an eſtate, he ſaid, Luke xii. 14. *Who made me a judge, or a divider, over you?* When he was appealed to about the lawfulneſs of paying tribute to the Romans, he cautiouſly anſwered, *Give unto Cæſar the things that are Cæſar's, and unto God the things that are God's.*

When Pilate, who certainly would not have been ſo much diſpoſed to favour him, as he evidently was, if he had ſuſpected him of any deſigns againſt the government, aſked him if he was a king, he acknowledged it, indeed, but added, that *his kingdom was not of this world*, and that he was *ſent to bear witneſs concerning truth.*

When the common people would more than once have placed him at their head, and have actually made him a king, he always rejected the propoſal with indignation, ſo that at length they ceaſed to importune him on the ſubject. If he had had any ſcheme of this kind, but did not chooſe to truſt the common people, he would naturally have conſulted with the great men of his nation; and this might have recommended him to them. Whereas ſo differently did they conceive of his views, as moſt hoſtile to theirs (whoſe wiſh, as their whole hiſtory ſhews, was to emancipate themſelves from the yoke of the Romans) that they thought there was no ſafety for themſelves but in putting him to death, which accordingly they contrived and executed.

This, however, certainly ſhews, that Jeſus was a very conſpicuous character. Elſe, why all this alarm? He had no advantage of birth, or connections, that could

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make him formidable. He does not appear to have been a man of any extraordinary natural talents; and, according to Mr. Paine, could not even write his name. Why then were the rulers of the Jewiſh nation ſo much afraid of him? Why take the life of a poor, illiterate carpenter, and, not content with their own forms of judicature, contrive to get him condemned by the Roman Governor himſelf, and crucified by his order?

But Mr. Paine ſays, "The manner in which he was "apprehended ſhews he was not much known at that "time, and it ſhews alſo that the meetings he then held "with his followers were in ſecret, and that he had given "over, or ſuſpended, preaching publicly. Judas could "no otherwiſe betray him, than by giving information "where he was, and pointing him out to the officers, "who went to arreſt him; and the reaſon for employ-"ing and paying Judas for this, could ariſe only from "the cauſes already mentioned, that of his not being "much known, and living concealed."

This difficulty, however, is eaſily removed. The apprehenſion of Jeſus was to be in the night, and by the common officers of juſtice; and it is very poſſible that, let a man be ever ſo well known in the day time, ſuch perſons as theſe might neither be able to find him in the night, nor diſtinguiſh his perſon at that time, without ſome aſſiſtance. Beſides, why did the Jewiſh rulers think it neceſſary to uſe the precaution of apprehending Jeſus in the night, but becauſe he was ſo popular at that time with the common people, that the apprehending of him in the day time was thought to be too hazardous? That the preaching of Jeſus was then, and at all times, moſt public, his whole hiſtory clearly ſhews; and when he was ſeized in the night, he himſelf ſaid, Mark xiv. 48. *Are ye come out as againſt a thief, with ſwords and with ſtaves, to take me? I was daily with you in the temple, teaching, and ye took me not.*

Mr. Paine ſays, "The idea of the concealment "of Jeſus, not only agrees very ill with his reput-"ed divinity, but aſſociates with it ſomething of pu-

" ſillanimity; and his being betrayed, or in other words " his being apprehended, on the information of one of " his followers, ſhews that he did not intend to be ap- " prehended, and conſequently that he did not intend " to be crucified."

It would be of material conſequence to the cauſe of infidelity, that what Mr. Paine here aſſerts ſhould be true, viz. that Jeſus had no apprehenſion of the violent death to which he was expoſed. But the whole of his hiſtory ſhews, that he knew from the beginning that he was to die in conſequence of his undertaking, and by a public crucifixion; and though for ſome time he choſe to withdraw himſelf from the perſecution of his enemies, it was only till the proper time was come for his throwing himſelf into their hands.

Some time before his laſt journey to Jeruſalem, it is ſaid, Matt. xvi. 21. *From that time forth began Jeſus to ſhew unto his diſciples how that he muſt go up unto Jeruſalem, and ſuffer many things of the elders, and chief prieſts, and ſcribes, and be killed, and be raiſed again the third day.* At the ſame time, and on other occaſions, he plainly forewarned his followers, that they muſt be ready to ſuffer as he did; language which was ill calculated to favour any conceivable purpoſe of an impoſtor. When Peter on this occaſion rebuked him, ſaying, *Be it far from thee, Lord; this ſhall not be unto thee; he turned and ſaid unto him, Get thee behind me, Satan; thou art an offence unto me, for thou favoureſt not the things that are of God, but thoſe that be of men.* He then ſaid to his diſciples, *If any man is willing to come after me, let him deny himſelf, and take up his croſs, and follow me;* for *whoſoever will ſave his life ſhall loſe it, and whoſoever will loſe his life for my ſake ſhall find it.* If they were to die in his cauſe, what proſpect could they have of gaining any thing by their attachment to him?

In one of the public diſcourſes of Jeſus, in which he compared himſelf to a ſhepherd, he ſaid, John x. 15. *I lay down my life for the ſheep, and therefore does my Father*

ther love me, becauſe I lay down my life that I might take it again.

On his laſt journey to Jeruſalem, he ſaid, Matt. xvii. 22. *The ſon of man ſhall be betrayed into the hands of men, and they ſhall kill him, and the third day he ſhall be raiſed again*; when we find the diſciples, to whom this language was addreſſed, as was natural, *exceedingly ſorry.*

That Jeſus went to Jeruſalem at this time with a fixed purpoſe to die there, is evident from what he ſaid when he was told that Herod ſought to kill him, Luke xiii. 33. *I muſt walk to day and to-morrow, and the day following; for it cannot be that a prophet periſh out of Jeruſalem.* As they were travelling, Matt. xx. 17. *he took the twelve diſciples apart in the way, and ſaid unto them, Behold we go up to Jeruſalem, and the ſon of man ſhall be betrayed unto the chief prieſts, and unto the ſcribes; and they ſhall condemn him to death, and ſhall deliver him to the Gentiles, to mock and to ſcourge him; and the third day he ſhall riſe again.*

When Jeſus was arrived at Bethany, and was at ſupper there, he ſaid, by way of apology for Mary, who had anointed him with ſome valuable ointment, John xii. 7. "Let her alone, againſt the day of my embalming has "ſhe kept this." When he was diſcourſing in the temple, a few days before his death, he ſaid, alluding to it, v. 24. "Except a grain of wheat fall into the ground, "and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth "forth much fruit. He that loveth his life ſhall loſe "it, and he that hateth his life in this world ſhall keep "it unto life eternal." That he not only apprehended his death at this time, but that he was moſt ſenſibly affected with the idea of it, appears from what he added on this occaſion: "Now is my ſoul troubled, and what "ſhall I ſay? Father, ſave me from this hour. But "for this cauſe came I unto this hour."

But nothing ſhews the ſteady purpoſe of Jeſus to give up his life to his undertaking, whatever it was, more clearly than his ſolemn inſtitution of the euchariſt the very night in which he was betrayed, expreſsly as a memorial

morial of his death; the bread repreſenting his body, which was to be broken, and the wine his blood, which was to be ſhed. All his diſcourſes to his diſciples, recorded in John xiv. xv. and xvi. and his ſolemn prayer, ch. xvii. as they went to the garden of Gethſemane, were calculated to comfort them with reſpect to his approaching death, and his temporary ſeparation from them. John xvi. 16. *A little while, and ye ſhall not ſee me; and again a little while, and ye ſhall ſee me; becauſe I go to the Father. Verily, verily, I ſay unto you, that ye ſhall weep and lament, but the world ſhall rejoice; and ye ſhall be ſorrowful, but your ſorrow ſhall be turned into joy. Ye now have ſorrow; but I will ſee you again, and your heart ſhall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you.* In his laſt prayer he ſays, John xvii. 11. *Now I am no more in the world; but theſe are in the world, and I come to thee.* What did he mean by this, but that he was going to die? In the garden he appears to have felt what I believe any man of equal ſenſibility would have felt in the ſame circumſtances. But though he wiſhed, if it had been poſſible, to have avoided his painful and ignominious death, and therefore prayed, ſaying, Matt. xxvi. 39. "O "my Father, if it be poſſible, let this cup paſs from "me:" he added, "nevertheleſs, not as I will, but as "thou wilt."

As Jeſus knew from the beginning, the purpoſe of Judas, why, if he did not mean to be apprehended, did he go to the place where he expected to meet him, and why did he not endeavour to make his eſcape, which (when they who came to apprehend him, probably overawed by his preſence and manner of ſpeaking, *fell to the ground*, John xviii. 6.) he had an opportunity of doing? When he was in the preſence of his Jewiſh judges, and of Pilate, did he behave like a man who wiſhed to avoid the fate that he could not but ſee was impending over him? Had he recourſe to any mean ſubmiſſion, or apologies, to ſave his life? Nay, did he not ſhew as great marks of preſence of mind, and calm intrepidity, as any man ever ſhewed in the face of certain death?

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If all the circumſtances of the apprehenſion, the trial, and crucifixion, of Jeſus, be duly attended to, we ſhall no where find an example of truer fortitude, accompanied with the moſt perfect benevolence, and the moſt entire reſignation to the will of God; eſpecially if we conſider his extreme ſenſibility, diſcovered in his agony in the garden. To die with a ſpirit of revenge, and to bear torture with rage againſt a man's enemies, is a common and low attainment, compared to dying with that ſpirit of perfect meekneſs, and forgiveneſs, which was diſcovered by Jeſus, when he prayed for his executioners. This argues a mind of a ſuperior and extraordinary caſt.

Mr. Paine, not conſidering that the great uſe of the death of Chriſt was to prepare the way for the moſt ſatisfactory evidence of the reſurrection, ſays, p. 52, "The "chriſtian mythologiſts tell us, that Chriſt died for the "ſins of the world, and that he came on purpoſe to die. "Would it not then have been the ſame, if he had "died of a fever or the ſmall pox, of old age, or of any "thing elſe?" But it is obvious to obſerve, that had Chriſt died of any diſeaſe, and of courſe in *private*, among his friends, it would always have been ſaid, by unbelievers, that he had never been actually dead; whereas this could not be ſaid of a man who was condemned to death by his enemies, and publicly crucified.

Mr. Paine's account of the reſurrection of Jeſus ſhews that he was but little acquainted with the circumſtances of that part of the hiſtory. "A ſmall number of "perſons," he ſays, p. 21, "not more than eight or "nine, are introduced as proxies for the whole world, to "ſay they ſaw it; and all the reſt of the world are called "upon to believe it. But it appears that Thomas did "not believe the reſurrection; and, as they ſay, would "not believe, without having ocular and manual de"monſtration himſelf; ſo neither will I; and the reaſon "is equally as good for me, and for every other perſon, "as for Thomas. It is in vain to attempt to palliate "or diſguiſe this matter. The ſtory, ſo far as relates to

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" the ſupernatural parts, has every mark of fraud and " impoſition ſtamped upon the face of it. Who are the " authors of it, it is as impoſſible for us to know, as it " is for us to be aſſured that the books in which the " account is related were written by the perſons whoſe " names they bear. The beſt ſurviving evidence we " now have, reſpecting this affair, is the Jews. They " are regularly deſcended from the people who lived in " the time that this reſurrection and aſcenſion are ſaid " to have happened; and they ſay it is not true."

Inſtead of eight or nine, the eleven apoſtles, and ſeveral other perſons, ſaw Jeſus repeatedly after his reſurrection; and he met the great body of his diſciples, in Galilee, by particular appointment. Paul ſays, 1 Cor. xv. 6. that "he was ſeen by more than five hundred at once, the " greater part of them being then alive;" and it is eaſy to obſerve, that if the evidence of five hundred perſons, none of whom had any intereſt in deceiving, or being deceived, was not deemed ſufficient to eſtabliſh the truth of any fact, which requires nothing more than the evidence of the *ſenſes*, that of five thouſand, or any other number, might be objected to as inſufficient. And ſo far is this ſtory from bearing any mark of fraud, or impoſition, that I challenge Mr. Paine or any other perſon to propoſe any other circumſtances that would have made it more credible than it now is, at this diſtance of time. This I think I have ſufficiently ſhewn in my *Diſcourſe* on this ſubject, though I do not expect that Mr. Paine will think it worth his while to look into it.

If by the *Jews*, who ſay that the ſtory of the reſurrection is *not true*, Mr. Paine means the Jews of this age, or the Jewiſh Rulers, and the majority of the Jewiſh nation, at the time, it is acknowledged. But their unbelief is much more eaſily accounted for, on the ſuppoſition of the ſtory being true, than the belief of the many thouſands of Jews, who entertained no doubt of it at the time, on the ſuppoſition of its not being true. For theſe muſt have had as ſtrong a prejudice againſt the belief of it, as any other Jews; and no prejudice, of

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which we have any account in hiſtory, could be ſtronger than this.

Had the Jewiſh nation in general, in conſequence of their believing this fact, become Chriſtians, Mr. Paine would have had much more to object to the ſtory than he now has; as he would, no doubt, have ſaid that the Jewiſh prieſts and rulers were in the ſecret, and muſt have had it in their power to contrive and execute the ſcheme of a reſurrection, or any thing elſe which they had thought proper for their purpoſe; that there does not appear to have been any motive for a rigorous inquiry into the truth at the time, and that it is too late now.

Mr. Paine may require the ſame evidence for the reſurrection of Jeſus, that Thomas did; and he may require the ſame evidence of any other fact, and believe nothing but what he himſelf ſees. But it ſatisfies me, that perſons as incredulous as Thomas evidently was, and as much ſo as Mr. Paine himſelf could have been, perſons as capable of judging in the caſe, and as much diſpoſed rigorouſly to examine into the truth, were convinced of it. The evidence that ſatisfied ſuch perſons as theſe, and a ſufficient number of them, would, no doubt, have ſatisfied me, if I had been in their place. It is not expected, that facts in the chriſtian hiſtory, or thoſe in any other hiſtory, will be believed by the violently prejudiced. It is enough that they gain the aſſent of perſons of competent judgment and candour, and whoſe minds are in a proper ſtate to be impreſſed by reaſonable evidence. *I am, &c.*

LETTER IV.

Of the proper Origin of the Scheme of Chriſtianity, and Antiquity of the Books of the New Teſtament.

DEAR SIR,

MR. PAINE's account of the origin of what he calls chriſtianity is the moſt curious romance I have ever met

with. He does not deal in dates, any more than in quotations, writing wholly from his memory, and, as he acknowledges, without having even a bible at hand. But he ſhould have told us about what time he ſuppoſed the chriſtian ſyſtem, which gives him ſo much offence, was formed. He owns it is unjuſtly aſcribed to Chriſt himſelf. We may therefore ſuppoſe, that the æra to which he refers it was either the time when the books of the New Teſtament were written, or when they were collected and arranged as they now are. But as they were collected and kept together, almoſt as ſoon as they were written, thoſe two dates cannot be far diſtant from one another; and, indeed, he himſelf makes no great diſtinction between them; but, having no knowledge of hiſtory, he refers the writing of theſe books to a period even ſome centuries later than the true one, as acknowledged by all other enemies of chriſtianity.

"The writings aſcribed to the men called Apoſtles," he ſays, p. 73, "are chiefly controverſial; and the "gloomineſs of the ſubject they dwell upon, that of a "man dying in agony on the croſs, is better ſuited to "the gloomy ſenſes of a monk in a cell, by whom it is "not impoſſible they were written, than to any man "breathing the open air of the creation."

Now it is well known that nothing of the ſyſtem of monkery exiſted, or was thought of, in the time of the apoſtles; and the great maxims of their writings condemn every thing that leads to it. Let Mr. Paine point out any paſſage in the New Teſtament, that, in the moſt diſtant manner, intimates that God is pleaſed by the mortifications and torments that men inflict on themſelves, or that it is their duty, or at all acceptable to God, that they ſhould ſhut themſelves up from the world, and decline the active duties of life. On the contrary, if he will condeſcend to look into his bible once more (but from the contempt with which he ſpeaks of it, it is not probable he ever will, or that he could read it without prejudice, if he did) he will find that the great duties which he himſelf would ſay are

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moſt incumbent upon men as members of ſociety, are thoſe which are chiefly inſiſted upon there, and that nothing is more ſtrongly inculcated in the ſcriptures, than that men are to ſhew their love to God, their common parent, by kind offices to his children and their brethren.

Mr. Paine is of opinion, p. 58, "That the paſſages "in the New Teſtament, on which the whole theory or "doctrine of what is called the *redemption* is built, have "been manufactured and fabricated, on purpoſe to "bring forward the ſecondary and pecuniary redemptions "of the church of Rome. Why," ſays he, "are we to "give this church credit, when ſhe tells us that thoſe "books are genuine in every part, any more than we give "her credit for any thing elſe ſhe has told us, or for "the miracles ſhe ſays ſhe has performed? That ſhe "could fabricate writings is certain, becauſe ſhe could "write, and the compoſition of the writings in queſtion "is of that kind, that any body might do it; and that "ſhe did fabricate them is not more inconſiſtent with "probability than that ſhe ſhould tell us, as ſhe has "done, that ſhe could, and did, work miracles."

Here Mr. Paine is guilty of the groſſeſt anachroniſm, ſince it is well known, that the ſyſtem of *pecuniary redemptions* was not eſtabliſhed till many centuries after the writing of the books of the New Teſtament, which it is evident contain nothing that could lead to it. To ſay that the church could, or that it was willing to invent books, with any particular view, is nothing to the purpoſe, when all hiſtory ſhews that the books actually exiſted long before the church had any ſuch views. Beſides, if ſome perſons were intereſted in forging books, were not others as much intereſted in detecting the forgery? Or will Mr. Paine ſay, that the apoſtles, and other primitive chriſtians, had any advantage in point of literature, or ſuperior underſtanding, which could enable them to impoſe upon the whole world, and ſo much to their injury as Mr. Paine pretends? This *church* muſt have been a moſt extraordinary perſonage, to have done all that Mr. Paine aſcribes to her. She muſt have

been a very great knave, and the world a very great fool. But all knavery has not been confined to churchmen, nor all folly to the reſt of the world. Hiſtory ſhews that both theſe articles have been pretty equally divided between them both.

Writing, as Mr. Paine evidently does, without the leaſt knowledge of the ſcriptures, or indeed of hiſtory, his work may make an impreſſion on thoſe who are as ignorant as himſelf. But what ſcholar will not ſmile at his account of the influence which he aſſerts the progreſs of chriſtianity had on *the progreſs of knowledge?* "However unwilling," he ſays, p. 96, "the partiſans of "the chriſtian ſyſtem may be to believe or acknowledge "it, it is nevertheleſs true, that the age of ignorance "commenced with the chriſtian ſyſtem. There was "more knowledge in the world before that period, than "for many centuries afterwards." "Had the progreſſion "of knowledge," p. 98, "gone on proportionably with "the ſtock that before exiſted, that chaſm" (meaning what are generally called *the dark ages*) "would have "been filled up with characters riſing ſuperior in know-"ledge to each other; and thoſe ancients, we now ſo "much admire, would have appeared reſpectably in the "back ground of the ſcene. But the chriſtian ſyſtem "laid all waſte."

He farther ſays, p. 92, "The ſetters up and the ad-"vocates of the chriſtian ſyſtem of faith could not "but foreſee, that the continually progreſſive knowledge "that man would gain by the aid of ſcience, of the pow-"er and wiſdom of God manifeſted in the ſtructure of "the univerſe, and in all the works of the creation, "would militate againſt, and call into queſtion, the "truth of their ſyſtem of faith; and therefore it became "neceſſary to their purpoſe to cut learning down to a "ſize leſs dangerous to their project; and this they ef-"fected, by reſtricting the idea of learning to the ſtudy "of dead languages."

In all this Mr. Paine muſt have written from documents exiſting in his own brain only, the real ſtate of things

things is ſo much the reverſe of what he deſcribes. No real progreſs had in fact been made in any thing that Mr. Paine himſelf would call *uſeful ſcience* for ſeveral centuries before the chriſtian æra. The only purſuits to which men of leiſure and letters devoted themſelves, related to the arts of ſpeaking and writing. In the knowledge of moral duties, it is ceratin, that no real progreſs was made; nor do I think that Mr. Paine will ſay, that in all this period any conſiderable improvement was made in the ſcience of government; and for about three centuries after the chriſtian æra, every thing of this kind went on juſt as it had done before, without any obſtruction, but without any real progreſs. How then does it appear, that in this reſpect "the chriſtian ſyſtem laid all waſte?"

Chriſtianity was promulgated in a ſtate of the world, the moſt enlightened, the moſt favourable to the progreſs of knowledge, and conſequently the moſt unfavourable to any ſcheme of impoſture, of any from the beginning of the world to that time. All the civilized part of the world was then at peace, and the ruling nation had been for ſome time enamoured with ſuch ſcience as then prevailed. Chriſtianity, though at firſt embraced chiefly by the unlearned, ſoon made converts of the learned, and in conſequence of this, the heathen writers became fewer, and the chriſtian writers more numerous; and there was certainly no appearance of the learned among the chriſtians diſcouraging literature. This was ſo far from being the caſe, that in a very ſhort time the chriſtans publiſhed more books than the heathens had ever done, till at length we hardly find any heathen writers at all, but chriſtian writers without number. And this continued to be the caſe till the invaſion of the Roman Empire by the northern barbarians; and this circumſtance, not chriſtianity, was the thing that *laid all waſte*.

As to the deep ſcheme that Mr. Paine aſcribes to the "ſetters up of the chriſtian faith," in conſequence of the umbrage they took at the progreſs of knowledge,

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viz. their contriving that all learning ſhould conſiſt in the ſtudy of dead languages, I will venture to ſay, it never exiſted but in his own ſingle imagination, no other writer, at leaſt, having ever entertained ſuch a notion. The apoſtles, and other early chriſtians, whom Mr. Paine may call the *ſetters up* of chriſtianity, were in general unacquainted with any language but their own, except that ſome of them underſtood Greek. This, however, was ſo much the language to which all perſons who could read were moſt accuſtomed, that it was neceſſary that all the books of the New Teſtament ſhould be in that language; and in all the eaſtern parts of the world, nothing was written in any other language, by chriſtians or heathens.

At Rome, and in the weſtern parts of the empire, the chriſtians, as well as the heathens, wrote only in Latin, and few of them appear to have known any thing of Greek. There were then no dead languages to ſtudy, except *Hebrew*, with which only a few of the more learned chriſtians were acquainted. But thoſe who were, and thoſe who in any other reſpect diſtinguiſhed themſelves by their application to literature, as Origen, Jerom, Pamphilus of Cæſarea, and Euſebius, were held in the higheſt eſteem on that account. How then did chriſtianity lay all things waſte?

On the irruption of the northern barbarians (which is well known to have been the commencement of that age of darkneſs which Mr. Paine aſcribes to chriſtianity) all the books, and the literature which then exiſted, were preſerved, not by heathens, but by chriſtians; and, had Mr. Paine been living at that time, he muſt have looked for every thing of this kind in cathedral churches, but more eſpecially in monaſteries, where it was the occupation of many of the fraternity to tranſcribe ancient books; and without this it is probable we ſhould not now have had any of the writings of thoſe ancients, of whom our author (without knowing perhaps ſo much of them as he does of the ſcriptures) ſpeaks with ſo much reſpect. What was done for the remains

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of Roman literature by the chriſtian monks in the weſt, was done for the Greek literature by thoſe in the eaſt.

In thoſe times, and at the revival of letters, all books being in Greek or Latin, the knowledge of thoſe languages became abſolutely neceſſary; and without any concurrence of the prieſts, and much leſs of the ſetters up of the chriſtian faith, who had all been dead many centuries, it was the only ſource of knowledge; and almoſt the whole of literature was, in their circumſtances, reduced to the ſtudy of them. Such is the *deep ſcheme* laid by the ſetters up of chriſtianity to confine all learning to the ſtudy of languages. How a plain tale, as Shakeſpeare ſays, will ſometimes put a man down!

Mr. Paine's account of the compiling of the canon of the New Teſtament is ſufficiently of a piece with his account of the origin of chriſtianity. "How much," he ſays, p. 35, "or what parts, of the books now called "the New Teſtament, were written by the perſons "whoſe names they bear, is what we can know nothing "of; neither are we certain in what language they "were originally written." Now there is, I may venture to ſay, a hundred times the evidence of the books of the New Teſtament having been written by the perſons whoſe names they bear, that there is of Virgil or Ovid having been the authors of the poems aſcribed to them, or Julius Cæſar of his *Commentaries*; and there never was the leaſt doubt as to the language in which any of the books of the New Teſtament was written, except with reſpect to the goſpel of Matthew, which ſome ſaid was written in Greek, and others in Hebrew, and which was probably written in both.

In proportion as any ſubject is more intereſting, the more pains men will naturally take to aſcertain the truth; and the Chriſtians who made ſo much uſe of the books of the New Teſtament, and who valued them ſo highly, were from the beginning exceedingly careful in diſtinguiſhing thoſe that were genuine from thoſe that were ſpurious. Euſebius divides thoſe that were not ſpurious into two claſſes, thoſe that were univerſally received,

ceived, and thoſe of doubtful authority; and the former contains all the hiſtorical books, or thoſe which record facts, and likewiſe the epiſtles which bear the name of *Paul*. Indeed, as theſe epiſtles were moſtly written to whole churches, it was abſolutely impoſſible that an impoſition with reſpect to *them* ſhould not have been detected.

The only books, of the genuineneſs of which the Chriſtians in the early ages had any doubt, are very few, and thoſe of the leaſt conſequence. There never was any more doubt of the epiſtles of Paul being really written by him (tho' Mr. Paine, without giving any reaſon for it, ſuppoſes, p. 56, that even theſe may be ſpurious) than that the epiſtles of Cicero were written by that Roman orator. The internal evidence is alſo as ſtrong in the one caſe as in the other. Let any perſon read Mr. Paley's *Horæ Paulinæ*, and be of a different opinion if he can. I will add, that for theſe epiſtles (to ſay nothing of the other books of the New Teſtament) to be written ſo early, and to be received as they were, and the facts referred to in them not to be true, is abſolutely impoſſible, if human nature was the ſame thing then that it is now.

Mr. Paine farther ſays, p. 33, "When the chriſtian "mythologiſts eſtabliſhed their ſyſtem, they collected "all the writings they could find, and managed them "as they pleaſed. It is a matter altogether of uncer-"tainty to us, whether ſuch of the writings as now ap-"pear under the name of the Old or the New Teſta-"ment, are in the ſame ſtate in which thoſe collectors "ſay they found them, or whether they added, altered, "abridged, or dreſſed them up. Be this as it may, "they decided by vote, which of the books out of the "collection they made ſhould be the word of God, and "which ſhould not. They rejected ſeveral; they voted "others to be doubtful, ſuch as the books called the "*Apocrypha*; and thoſe books which had a majority of "votes were voted to be the word of God. The book "of Luke was carried by a majority of one only. Had "they voted otherwiſe, all the people ſince, calling themſelves

" themſelves Chriſtians, had believed otherwiſe. For " the belief of the one comes from the vote of the other. " Who the people were that did all this we know no- " thing of; they called themſelves by the general " name of the *church*, and this is all we know of the " matter."

This may be all that Mr. Paine knows of the matter. But any perſon who will take the trouble may eaſily know a great deal more, and that the fact was the reverſe of what Mr. Paine deſcribes. The greater part of the books of the New Teſtament (and I have no occaſion to look any farther) were unqueſtionably written while the facts recorded or alluded to in them were recent, and they were received with full credit by thoſe who were deeply intereſted in their contents. They were written, not in concert, or at one time, but ſeparately, and by different perſons, as particular occaſions called for them. Having relation to the ſame great ſubject, they were, as might naturally be expected, collected and kept together, as the Jews did the different books of their ſcriptures. But all perſons uſing their beſt judgment and opportunities, ſome collected more, and others fewer, of them.

In this ſtate things continued near four hundred years; when, as theſe books, written by apoſtles or apoſtolical men, were appealed to in the deciſion of controverſies, it was thought proper to have a ſtandard collection; and the biſhops, met in council at Laodicea, *Anno Domini* 373, did this as well as they could, but by no means to the ſatisfaction of all. For, with reſpect to ſome of the books, there are different opinions even to this day. What books ſhould be taken into this collection, and be deemed *canonical*, was of courſe decided by vote; but if, as Mr. Paine ſays, thoſe biſhops had managed the buſineſs *as they pleaſed*, and not to the ſatisfaction of the chriſtian world in general (then, and from the beginning, divided into many parties, ſome of whom were ſure to object to what had been done by others) their deciſion would have ſignified very little.

As to the goſpel of Luke being carried by a majority of one only, it is a legend, if not of Mr. Paine's own invention, of no better authority whatever. For my own part, I muſt ſay that I never heard of it before; and on the ſame authority, I doubt not, he might have added, if he had ſo pleaſed, that the goſpel of Matthew was carried by two votes, that of Mark by three, and that of John by four. The goſpel of Luke, and the *Acts of the Apoſtles*, written alſo by him, are unqueſtionably among the oldeſt books of the New Teſtament. They were evidently written before the deſtruction of Jeruſalem, and their authenticity was never called in queſtion by any perſon, Chriſtian, Jew, or Heathen; ſo that it never was in the power of any council, by any voting, to ſhake their eſtabliſhed credit. He might juſt as well ſay, that it is in the power of any aſſembly of literati to vote *Rapin's hiſtory of England*, or *Ramſay's of the American Revolution*, to be authentic, or not.

Mr. Paine ſays, the chriſtian mythologiſts eſtabliſhed their ſyſtem at the time that the canon of the books of the New Teſtament was formed; though this was near the cloſe of the fourth century, long after the Roman Empire became chriſtian. Will Mr. Paine ſay, that there was no chriſtianity in the world before that time? Others will ſay, that its beſt days were then over, and that a corrupted kind of chriſtianity had then begun to take its place. And it was not till long after that time, that, from cauſes eaſily traced, it came to be that ſyſtem of prieſtcraft and oppreſſion, which Mr. Paine ſo ignorantly confounds with chriſtianity itſelf. *I am, &c.*

LETTER V.

Of Mr. Paine's Ideas of the Doctrines and Principles of Chriſtianity.

DEAR SIR,

YOU have ſeen, and, I dare ſay, have been ſurpriſed at, the ignorance of Mr. Paine, on the ſubject of revelation

tion in general, and of the *evidence*, as well as of the *ſpirit*, of chriſtianity in particular. But his ignorance, real or affected (for I own I ſuſpect the latter) of the *doctrines and principles* of it, is not leſs. He loads the ſyſtem with all the abſurdities which, he might eaſily have known, have long been diſcarded by intelligent Chriſtians. But ſuch a view of its doctrines as he has given beſt anſwered his purpoſe, which was to diſcredit revelation, by turning it into ridicule. Indeed, the greateſt part of his book conſiſts of little elſe than this kind of ſcurrility, of which I ſhall only give the following ſpecimen.

"Putting aſide," he ſays, p. 89, "the outrage offered to the moral juſtice of God, by ſuppoſing him to make the innocent ſuffer for the guilty, and alſo the looſe morality, and low contrivance, of ſuppoſing him to change himſelf into the ſhape of a man, in order to make an excuſe to himſelf for not executing his ſuppoſed ſentence upon Adam; it is certain, that what is called the chriſtian ſyſtem of faith, including in it the whimſical account of the creation, the ſtrange ſtory of Eve, the ſnake and the apple, the amphibious idea of a man God, the corporeal idea of the death of a God, the mythological idea of a family of gods, and the chriſtian ſyſtem of arithmetic, that three are *one* and one *three*, are all irreconcilable, not only to the divine gift of reaſon God has given to man, but to the knowledge that man gains of the power and wiſdom of God by the aid of the ſciences, and by ſtudying the ſtructure of the univerſe that God has made."

As Mr. Paine is far from being deficient in underſtanding, he might, with a little pains, have ſatisfied himſelf, that the doctrines of *atonement*, *incarnation*, and the *trinity*,* to which he here alludes, have no more foundation in the ſcriptures than the doctrines of tranſubſtantiation,

* "Chriſtian mythology," he ſays, p. 107, "has five deities. There is "God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Ghoſt, the God providence, "and the Goddeſs nature." On what authority Mr. Paine aſſerts this, is beſt known to himſelf. He might juſt as well have ſaid, that chriſtians had fifty, or five hundred, deities,

ſubſtantiation, or tranſmigration. He might have added all the peculiar doctrines of the church of Rome, and the diſcordant doctrines of all other churches, nominally chriſtian.

Mr. Paine, either from art or for want of better information, uniformly takes it for granted, that every thing which has been aſcribed to revelation, even by the moſt abſurd of the Catholics, really belongs to it; and it is ſometimes amuſing, to follow him in his obſervations on ſubjects concerning which he is wholly ignorant. On that of *myſtery*, as well as on that of *miracles* and *prophecy*, which I ſhall preſently conſider, he enlarges much to his own ſatisfaction, and, as no doubt he thought, to the inſtruction of his readers.

"Having ſhewn," he ſays, p. 129, "the irreconcila-
"ble inconſiſtencies between the real word of God, ex-
"iſting in the univerſe, and that which is called the
"word of God, ſhewn to us in a printed book, that any
"man might make, I proceed to ſpeak of three princi-
"pal means, that have been employed in all ages, and
"perhaps in all countries, to impoſe upon mankind.
"Thoſe three means are *myſtery*, *miracle*, and *prophecy*.
"The two firſt are incompatible with true religion, and
"the third ought always to be ſuſpected." Then, after ſome juſt but obvious remarks upon the ſubject, he ſays, p. 231, "Though every created thing is in one ſenſe a
"myſtery, the word myſtery cannot be applied to moral
"truth, any more than obſcurity can be applied to light.
"The God in whom we believe is a God of moral truth,
"and not a God of myſtery or obſcurity. Myſtery is
"the antagoniſt of truth," &c. "Religion, therefore," p. 132, "being the belief of a God, and the practice of
"moral truth, cannot have any connexion with myſtery."

Mr. Paine, I ſuppoſe, did not know, that in many of his obſervations on this ſubject he was writing like a rational Chriſtian. He had never, I believe, heard, that Dr. Foſter, one of the moſt intelligent and moſt zealous of Chriſtians, and who wrote in defence of revelation, diſtinguiſhed himſelf by ſaying, that *where myſtery begins, religion ends.*

If

If we look into the ſcriptures, we ſhall find that the word *myſtery* is never uſed in the ſenſe that Mr. Paine affixes to it, viz. that of ſomething which it is impoſſible to underſtand, or comprehend; but only ſomething that was unknown till it was revealed, or explained. It was in this ſenſe that the word was uſed by all Chriſtians for ſeveral centuries before the doctrines of the trinity and tranſubſtantiation were known; and this was alſo the common uſe of the word in the Engliſh language. Thus the *myſteries of any trade* did not mean any thing incomprehenſible in that trade, but only the *ſecrets* of it, which every maſter was obliged to make known to his apprentice. The *great myſtery*, that the apoſtle Paul ſpeaks of, was the preaching of the goſpel to the Gentiles, as well as to the Jews; which, though unknown and unſuſpected by the zealots among the latter, there was no difficulty in underſtanding.

As to any other kind of myſtery in religion, ſuch as the doctrine of incarnation, that of the trinity, or tranſubſtantiation, we diſclaim them as much as Mr. Paine can do. We alſo agree with Mr. Paine, in acknowledging that there are ſome things which we cannot help believing, though we cannot comprehend them. He acknowledges the belief of a God to be in this ſenſe myſterious, or incomprehenſible. For certainly we can have no conception how the univerſe ſhould require a cauſe, and yet that the cauſe of the univerſe ſhould require none. But we find ourſelves compelled to believe it, becauſe we ſhould otherwiſe involve ourſelves in a ſtill greater difficulty, viz. that the univerſe muſt have begun to exiſt without any cauſe at all. Conſequently, ſomething *muſt* have been uncauſed. The chriſtian doctrine of a reſurrection is not more myſterious, in this ſenſe, than Mr. Paine's belief of an immaterial and immortal ſoul, which evidently does not think without the body, and the brain, and which it is therefore philoſophical to ſuppoſe incapable of thinking without them, and yet is taken for granted to continue to think, when the body and the brain are totally deſtroyed.

Mr.

Mr. Paine ſtrangely enough ſuppoſes, that we are to look for the origin of chriſtianity in that ſyſtem of *heatheniſm* to which it is moſt hoſtile, and which in the end it completely overthrew. "It is not difficult," he ſays, p. 16, "to account for the credit that was given "to the ſtory of Jeſus Chriſt being the ſon of God. "He was born at a time when the heathen mythology "had ſtill ſome faſhion and repute in the world, and "that mythology had prepared the people for the belief "of ſuch a ſtory. 'Tis curious," he farther ſays, p. 17, "to obſerve how the theory of what is called the chriſ- "tian church ſprung out of the tail of heathen my- "thology. A direct incorporation took place in the "firſt inſtance, by making the reputed founder to be "celeſtially begotten. The trinity of gods that then "followed, was no other than a reduction of the former "plurality, which was about twenty or thirty thouſand. "The ſtatue of Mary ſucceeded the ſtatue of Diana of "Epheſus. The deification of heroes changed into the "canonization of ſaints. The mythologiſts had gods "for every thing, the chriſtian mythologiſts had ſaints "for every thing. The church became as crowded with "the one, as the pantheon had been with the other, and "Rome was the place of both. The chriſtian theory "is little elſe than the idolatry of the ancient mytholo- "giſts accommodated to the purpoſes of power and "revenue, and it yet remains to reaſon and philoſophy "to aboliſh the amphibious fraud."

In all this, Mr. Paine, for want of better information, or affecting to want it, has moſt evidently confounded, as indeed he does perpetually, the corruptions of chriſtianity, and even thoſe of a very late date, with chriſtianity itſelf. The former, it is acknowledged, aroſe from the principles of the heathen philoſophy, and the heathen religion, as myſelf and many others have clearly proved. Mr. Paine ſhould have ſhewn, that theſe doctrines of the incarnation, of a trinity of gods, and a multiplicity of objects of worſhip, were authorized by the ſcriptures; becauſe otherwiſe it makes nothing for his argument.

But

But it was more convenient for his purpoſe not to make this obvious diſtinction. He muſt have known that there are many Chriſtians, who believe nothing more of the things that he here objects to than himſelf.

Mr. Paine is perpetually introducing the Moſaic account of the creation, as a neceſſary part, nay the very foundation, of the ſyſtem of revelation; and yet he himſelf ſays, p. 37, "that Moſes does not take it on "himſelf, by introducing it with the formality that he "uſes on other occaſions, ſuch as that of ſaying, "*The "Lord ſpake unto Moſes, ſaying.*" After giving an account of the ancient mythologiſts, and the war of the giants againſt Jupiter, he ſays, p. 24, "The chriſ-"tian mythologiſts tell, that their ſatan made war a-"gainſt the Almighty, who defeated him, and confined "him afterwards, not under a mountain, but in a pit. "It is here eaſy to ſee, that the firſt fable ſuggeſted the idea "of the ſecond. For the fable of Jupiter and the gi-"ants was told many hundred years before that of ſa-"tan. Thus far the ancient and the chriſtian my-"thologiſts differ very little from each other. But the "latter have contrived to carry the matter much far-"ther. They have contrived to connect the fabulous "part of the ſtory of Jeſus Chriſt with the fable origin-"ating from Mount Ætna; and, in order to make all "the parts of the ſtory tie together, they have taken to "their aid the tradition of the Jews. For the chriſtian "mythology is made up partly from the ancient my-"thology, and partly from the Jewiſh tradition."

From what we have already ſeen of Mr. Paine, we have no reaſon to expect from him much accuracy with reſpect to hiſtory and chronology. If he ſuppoſes, as he evidently does, that the fable of ſatan was ſubſequent to that of Jupiter and the giants, and borrowed from it, he ought to produce his authorities for ſo novel an opinion. For I believe it is univerſally allowed, that the books aſcribed to Moſes are at leaſt a thouſand years older than any others that are extant. But the hiſtory of ſatan, though found at full length in Milton, where Mr. Paine

Paine probably learned it, is not found in the writings of Moſes, who does not ſo much as mention ſatan, or the devil, in any part of his writings. Both the idea and terms were probably introduced from the oriental philoſophy, in which there was a *principle of evil* oppoſed to a principle of *good*. But by ſatan, or the devil, it is moſt probable that the ſacred writers meant only an allegorical, not a real, perſon. Our Saviour calls Judas *the devil*, and Peter *ſatan*, becauſe their thoughts were improper, ariſing from ſomething that was evil, or amiſs, within them.

"The moſt extraordinary," Mr. Paine ſays, p. 142, "of all things called miracles, related in the New Teſ-"tament, is that of the devil flying away with Jeſus "Chriſt, and carrying him to the top of a high moun-"tain, and to the top of the higheſt pinnacle of the "temple." But the probability is, either that all this ſcenery was a viſion, or a figurative account of what paſſed in the mind of Jeſus; repreſenting all the trials to which he would be expoſed in the courſe of his public miniſtry, trials ariſing from ambitious or intereſted views.

The ſtory of the *miraculous conception* of Jeſus could not eſcape a perſon whoſe object it was to turn chriſtianity into ridicule. So much does Mr. Paine conſider this miracle as eſſential to the chriſtian ſcheme, that he ſays, p. 19, "the account given of his reſurrection and "aſcenſion was the neceſſary counter part to the ſtory of "his birth." Now Mr. Paine might have known that there have been in all ages chriſtians who never profeſſed to believe the miraculous conception. The Jewiſh chriſtians in general, who may be preſumed to be the beſt judges in the caſe, never received it. Their goſpel, which was that of Matthew, had not the two firſt chapters, and though there is not the ſame external evidence of the ſpuriouſneſs of the two firſt chapters of the goſpel of Luke, there is great internal evidence of it, and ſome of an external nature, as may be ſeen in my *Hiſtory of early opinions concerning Jeſus Chriſt*. However, the truth of chriſtianity does not reſt upon any miracles performed

performed in ſecret, ſuch as that of the miraculous conception, or the temptation of Jeſus, if the literal account of it be true, but upon facts of the moſt public nature, which were open to the examination of great numbers of perſons, ſuch as his miracles wrought in the face of the whole country, in the preſence of his enemies, his death, and his reſurrection. If theſe facts were true, there can be no doubt of the divine origin of chriſtianity, whatever we may think of particular circumſtances relating to it.

The moſt extraordinary account of the nature and tendency of chriſtianity, that I believe was ever given by any man, and the fartheſt from every appearance of truth, is, Mr. Paine's repreſenting it as nearly allied to *atheiſm*. "As to the chriſtian ſyſtem of faith," he ſays, p. 74, "it appears to me as a ſpecies of atheiſm, a ſort "of religious denial of God. It profeſſes to believe in "a man, rather than a God. It is a compound, made "chiefly up of maniſm, with but little deiſm; and is as "near to atheiſm as twilight is to darkneſs. It intro-"duces between man and his maker an opaque body, "which it calls a redeemer, as the moon introduces her "opaque ſelf between the earth and the ſun; and it "produces by this means a religious, or an irreligious, "eclipſe of light. It has put the whole orb of reaſon "into ſhade. The effect of this obſcurity has been that "of turning every thing upſide down, and repreſenting "it in the reverſe; and among the revolutions it has "thus magically introduced, it has made a revolution in "theology."

This is ſuch random, wild aſſertion, as requires no particular refutation. With much more reaſon did Mr. Paine aſſert, that chriſtianity is nearly allied to paganiſm; for what he conceives chriſtianity to be, abounds with objects of worſhip, ſuperior and inferior, juſt as the Pagan religion did. In imitation of Mr. Paine, I ſhall not attempt to reaſon on this ſubject. Let any man read the New Teſtament, and ſay whether Jeſus and the apoſtles were atheiſts, or whether they taught what had any tendency to make them ſo. It looks as if Mr.

Paine was predetermined to load chriſtianity with every term of reproach that occurred to him, however inconſiſtent with one another. To complete the inconſiſtency, this ſame chriſtianity, which is ſo nearly allied both to *atheiſm* and *polytheiſm*, has, according to Mr. Paine, in my laſt quotation from him, a little of *deiſm* in it.

I am, &c.

LETTER VI.

Of Prophecy.

DEAR SIR,

MR. PAINE's account of *prophecy*, intended to turn the ſubject into ridicule, is, I believe, quite peculiar to himſelf, and by no means correſponds to what may be collected concerning it in the ſcriptures.

"All the parts of the Bible," he ſays, p. 48, "gen-
"erally known by the name of *the prophets*, are the
"works of the Jewiſh poets, and itinerant preachers,
"who mixed poetry, anecdotes and devotion, together."
"The word," he ſays, p. 44, "was originally a term of
"ſcience, promiſcuouſly applied to poetry and to muſic,
"and not reſtricted to any ſubject upon which poetry
"and muſic might be exerciſed. Deborah and Barak
"are called prophets, not becauſe they predicted any
"thing, but becauſe they compoſed the poem, or ſong,
"that bears their name in celebration of an act already
"done. David is ranked among the prophets, for he
"was a muſician, and was alſo reputed to be, though
"perhaps very erroneouſly, the author of the Pſalms.
"But Abraham, Iſaac, and Jacob, are not called proph-
"ets. It does not appear, from any account we have,
"that they could either ſing, play muſic, or make po-
"etry. We are told of *the greater and leſſer prophets*.
"They might as well tell us of the greater and leſſer
"God; for there cannot be degrees in propheſying,
"conſiſtently with its modern ſenſe. But there are de-
"grees in poetry, and therefore the phraſe is reconcilable

"to

" to the caſe, when we underſtand by it the greater and " leſſer poets."

It is truly curious to obſerve how completely Mr. Paine ſuppoſes he had obviated every thing that can be advanced by the friends of revelation on the ſubject of prophecy, by his new definition of the term. " It is " altogether unneceſſary," he ſays, p. 45, " after this, to " offer any obſervations upon what thoſe men ſtyled " *prophets* have written. The axe goes at once to the " root, by ſhewing that the original meaning of the " word has been miſtaken; and, conſequently, all the " inferences that have been drawn from thoſe books, " the devotional reſpect that has been paid to them, and " the laboured commentaries that have been written up- " on them, under that miſtaken meaning, are not worth " diſputing about."

No doubt, the prophets generally delivered themſelves in elevated language, ſuch as is ſaid to conſtitute *poetry*; but if Mr. Paine had not forgotten the contents of his Bible, he would have recollected that the Jewiſh prophets, in the plaineſt of all language, predicted many important future events, ſo as to be entitled to the name of *prophets*, in the ſtricteſt, and what he calls the modern, ſenſe of the word. Theſe predictions he ought to compare with the events predicted. It is not his arbitrarily changing the ſignification of a word that can avail him any thing.

Any perſon, who only looks into his Bible, muſt ſmile at Mr Paine's palpable miſtake of the meaning of the term *greater and leſſer prophets*; for it has no relation whatever to what they wrote, or to the manner of their writing, but only to the quantity of it. Iſaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, whoſe books are comparatively large, are, on that account, called *the greater prophets*. Whereas, Hoſea, and eleven others, who wrote but little, are therefore called *the leſſer prophets*.

As Mr. Paine triumphs not a little on this ſubject, I ſhall quote what he farther ſays upon it. " The origin- " al meaning of the words *prophet* and *propheſying*," he ſays, p. 82, " has been changed, and a prophet, in the

" ſenſe in which the word is now uſed, is a creature of " modern invention; and it is owing to this change in " the meaning of the words, that the flights and the " metaphors of the Jewiſh poets, and phraſes and ex- " preſſions now rendered obſcure by our not being ac- " quainted with the local circumſtances to which they " applied at the time they were uſed, have been erected " into prophecies, and made to bend to explanations at " the will and whimſical conceits of ſectaries, expound- " ers, and commentators. Every thing unintelligible " was prophetical, and every thing inſignificant was " typical. A blunder would have ſerved for a proph- " ecy, and a diſhclout for a type.

" If by a prophet we are to ſuppoſe a man to whom " the Almighty communicated ſome event that would " take place in future, either there were ſuch men, or " there were not. If there were, it is conſiſtent to be- " lieve, that the event ſo communicated would be told " in terms that could be underſtood, and not related in " ſuch a looſe and obſcure manner as to be out of the " comprehenſion of thoſe that heard it, and ſo equivo- " cal as to fit almoſt any circumſtance that might hap- " pen afterwards. It is conceiving very irreverently of " the Almighty, to ſuppoſe that he would deal in this " jeſting manner with mankind. Yet all the things " called *Prophecies* in the book called the Bible come " under this deſcription.

" But it is with prophecy as it is with miracle. It " would not anſwer the purpoſe, even if it were real. " Thoſe to whom a prophecy ſhould be told, could not " tell whether the man propheſied or lied, or whether " it had been revealed to him, or whether he con- " ceited it; and if the thing that he propheſied, or pre- " tended to propheſy, ſhould happen, or ſomething like " it, among the multitude of things that are daily hap- " pening, nobody could again know whether he fore- " knew it, or gueſſed at it, or whether it was accidental. " A prophet, therefore, is a character uſeleſs and unne- " ceſſary, and the ſafe ſide of the caſe is to guard againſt " being impoſed upon, by not giving credit to ſuch re- " lations."

By

By Mr. Paine's own account, he has not r
ble lately, and probably will never look into it
But I appeal to any perſon who is in the hab
ing it, whether *his* account of prophecy, or that which
I ſhall give, be the more juſt. Prophets, in the ſcripture ſenſe of the word, were men to whom God communicated whatever he intended to be delivered to others. Some of theſe communications were moral admonitions, but others were diſtinct, unequivocal annunciations of future events, to take place, either very ſoon or at diſtant periods. Such are the prophecies of Moſes, now in a ſtate of fulfilment, concerning the future hiſtory of the Iſraelitiſh nation, their ſettlement in the land of Canaan, their expulſion from it, and their diſperſion into all parts of the habitable world previous to their final reſtoration to it; thoſe of Iſaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and others, concerning many particular definite events, which happened in their own time, as well as the future glorious ſtate of their nation, and the peaceful and happy ſtate of the world in general; thoſe of Daniel, concerning the ſucceſſion of the four great monarchies; and thoſe of our Saviour, concerning the deſtruction of Jeruſalem and the Temple. Let any perſon of common diſcernment peruſe theſe prophecies, and ſay whether they could have been written ſo long before the events by *gueſs* or by *accident*. If not (which ſuch a perſon muſt pronounce to be the caſe) the language could only be dictated by that great Being who ſees all events in their moſt remote cauſes, and therefore are proofs of divine communication.

Some parts of the book of Daniel, and alſo of the Revelation, are written in ſuch a manner, that it is probable we ſhall not underſtand them completely, till we can compare them with the events to which they are to correſpond. But it is very poſſible we may then be ſatisfied, that only He, who can ſee the end from the beginning, could have deſcribed them, even in that obſcure manner, ſo long beforehand. And the reaſon of the obſcurity of thoſe particular prophecies, concerning events which are yet to come, is pretty obvious: for as theſe

prophecies

phecies are now in the hands of those who respect m, it might have been said, that they contributed to r own fulfilment by the friends of revelation endeaouring to bring about the events predicted. However, though some intermediate steps in the great train of events be thus obscure, both the great outline of the whole, and the catastrophe, are most clearly expressed. Obscure as is the language of these prophecies, they plainly enough indicate a long period of great corruption in christianity, especially by the rise of a persecuting power within itself; but that this power, together with all the temporal powers of this world in league with it, is to be overthrown; and that this will be a season of great calamity, such as the world had never experienced before: that after this, Christ will come in the clouds of heaven, when there will be a resurrection of the virtuous dead, and a commencement of a glorious and peaceful state of the world in general: after this will be the resurrection of all the dead, and the general judgment. Is it conceiving irreverently of the Almighty, and supposing that he jests with mankind, when he clearly announces to them events of this great magnitude, in which they are so nearly interested?

I am, &c.

LETTER VII.

The Conclusion.

DEAR SIR,

IT is amusing to observe how differently the same things impress different persons. Mr. Paine, speaking of the Bible in general, says, p. 38, "When we read the "obscene stories, the voluptuous debaucheries, the cru-"el and torturous executions, the unrelenting vindic-"tiveness, with which more than one half the Bible is "filled, it would be more consistent that we call it the "word of a dæmon, than the word of God. It is a "history of wickedness, that hath served to corrupt and "brutalize

" brutalize mankind; and for my own part, I ſincerely
" deteſt it, as I deteſt every thing that is cruel. We
" ſcarcely meet with any thing, a few phraſes excepted,
" but what deſerves either our abhorrence or our con-
" tempt, till we come to the miſcellaneous parts of the
" Bible."

The probability is, that I am much better acquainted with the Bible than Mr. Paine, and I read it daily in the original,* which is certainly ſome advantage, and one to which Mr. Paine will not pretend. Now I can truly ſay that I read it with increaſing ſatisfaction, and I hope with much advantage in a moral reſpect. I do not conſider it as written by divine inſpiration; but it conſiſts of books relating to the moſt important of all ſubjects; the hiſtorical parts being written by perſons well acquainted with the events which they relate, and the prophetical parts by perſons who had communications with God, ſo as to deliver the moſt ſolemn admonitions, or the moſt important predictions, in his name. There are the moſt unequivocal marks of the moſt exalted piety, and the pureſt benevolence, in the writers of theſe books; ſo that the peruſal of them cannot fail to warm the heart, by exciting the ſame generous ſentiments, with every thing that is truly great and excellent in man.

The Bible contains the hiſtory of a moſt remarkable people, through whom it has pleaſed God to make his principal communications to mankind; and being a truer hiſtory than any other, it exhibits a faithful account of the vices, as well as the virtues, of the moſt diſtinguiſhed perſons in that nation, as well as of ſome in other nations; but with the ſtrongeſt diſapprobation of thoſe vices: ſo that thoſe particulars in the narrative are as inſtructive as any others.

In the writings of Moſes and the prophets, in the diſcourſes of Chriſt, and in the epiſtles of the apoſtles, there is a dignity and an authority to which the writings of any of the heathens approach

*It ſhould ſeem as if, for a moment, Mr. Paine had forgotten was not written in Engliſh; ſince, as a proof that ſome parts " poetical meaſure," he quotes our common verſion. See the

dry, when compared
ancient philosophers
is most interested to
leave nothing unknown,
for man to be acquainted
most satisfactory view of the
with respect to this life,
prosperous or ad-
of the with confi-
of a future state of
Paine says, p. 150,
assistance is able
more probable to
ter, than that
has, before
certainly affords him
at all. For what was the
evidence before he had any?
in my opinion, no writ-
comparable to the scrip-
in giving just views of
of God, or in adding to
for the discharge of his
making him a proper subject of
future of being, of which it gives him
information and the most satisfactory evi-
I want words for words to express my
for which Mr. Paine expresses
those who are best ac-
between us.
these observations on this work
satisfaction; and am,
Dear Sir,
Yours, sincerely,
J. PRIESTLEY.

THE END.

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Socrates and Plato are cold and dry, when compared with them. The writings of the ancient philoſophers contain but little of what man is moſt intereſted to know. Whereas the ſcriptures leave nothing unknown, that it is of much importance for man to be acquainted with. They give the moſt ſatisfactory view of the whole conduct of Providence with reſpect to this life, ſo as to enable men, under all events, proſperous or adverſe, to live with ſatisfaction, and to die with confidence and joy, in the firmeſt belief of a future ſtate of retribution. Whereas, all that Mr. Paine ſays, p. 150, is, "that the power which gave him exiſtence is able "to continue it; and that it appears more probable to "him that he ſhall continue to exiſt hereafter, than that "he ſhould have had exiſtence, as he now has, before "that exiſtence began;" which certainly affords him no real ground of expectation at all. For what was the probability of his receiving exiſtence before he had any?

Upon the whole, there are, in my opinion, no writings whatever that are at all comparable to the ſcriptures for their moral tendency, in giving juſt views of the attributes and providence of God, or in adding to the dignity of man, fitting him for the diſcharge of his duty in this life, and making him a proper ſubject of another and better ſtate of being, of which it gives him the cleareſt information and the moſt ſatisfactory evidence. I own I am at a loſs for words to expreſs my veneration for thoſe books for which Mr. Paine expreſſes the greateſt contempt. Let thoſe who are beſt acquainted with them judge between us.

I ſhall be happy, if theſe obſervations on this work of Mr. Paine's give you any ſatisfaction; and am,

Dear Sir,

Yours, ſincerely,

J. PRIESTLEY.

Northumberland, in America, October 27, 1794.

THE END.

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